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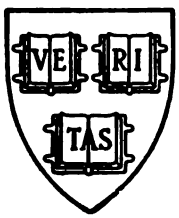

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THE POEMS OF

EDWARD ROWLAND SILL

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THE POEMS

OF

EDWARD ROWLAND SILL

CAMBRIDGE
Printed at The Riverside Press
1902

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EDWARD ROWLAND SILL

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EDWARD ROWLAND SILL

THE steady although somewhat tardy growth of Sill's reputation as a poet may best be illustrated by the history of his published writings. In 1868, seven years after leaving college, he issued, through the house of Leypoldt and Holt, a slender volume entitled *The Hermitage and Other Poems*. He waited fifteen years before venturing upon his next book, which was a still more tiny, privately printed volume, *The Venus of Milo and Other Poems*, dated at Berkeley, California, 1883. A year or two before his death, which occurred in 1887, his present publishers, who had noted with interest the poems which Sill had been contributing to the *Atlantic* and other periodicals, both under his own name and under pseudonyms, invited him to make a collection of his poetry for publication. He was in no haste to do this, for he was in the midst of his most fertile period of creative activity. While he was still uncertain as to his choice of material for the proposed volume, he passed

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away. But in November, 1887, his publishers issued *Poems by Edward Rowland Sill*, a volume which contained five pieces from *The Hermitage*, a considerable portion of the contents of *The Venus of Milo and Other Poems*, and a selection from the uncollected poems of the last four or five years of his life. This book won many readers. Two years later a second collection was made, bearing the title *The Hermitage and Later Poems*, and enriched with a tributary lyric by Mr. Aldrich. So constant did the interest in Sill's poetry prove to be, that in 1899, twelve years after the poet's death, his publishers presented a final volume of verse, *Hermione and Other Poems*, gathered from his manuscripts and from the various periodicals in which his work had appeared. It is by these books, together with *The Prose of Edward Rowland Sill* (1900), a volume made up chiefly of papers written for the Contributors' Club of the *Atlantic*, that his reputation as a man of letters has been established.

The interest aroused by Sill's writings is attributable in part, no doubt, to the marked individuality of the man. The story of his career is brief and modest. He was born in Windsor, Connecticut, April 29, 1841,

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of English and Welsh ancestry. His mother's father and grandfather were Congregational ministers. His father and his father's father were physicians and surgeons. He was graduated at Yale in 1861, and for some years was engaged in business in California. In 1867 he returned East with the expectation of entering the ministry, and studied for a few months at the Divinity School of Harvard University. He gave up the purpose, however, married, and began to occupy himself with literary work. He translated Rau's *Mozart*, and held for a while an editorial position on the *New York Evening Mail*. But his peculiar power in stimulating the minds of others drew him into the work of teaching, and he became principal of an academy in Ohio. His California life, however, had given him a strong attachment to the Pacific coast and a sense that his health would be better there, and accordingly, on receiving an invitation to a position in the Oakland High School, he removed to California in 1871. In 1874, he accepted the chair of English Literature in the University of California, and filled it with rare success for eight years. Compelled by failing health to resign in 1882, he passed the latest years of his life in Ohio,

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and died in Cleveland, after a brief illness, on February 27, 1887.

Yet back of this career, typical of that of many of his countrymen in its frequent changes of scene, its patient struggle against hard conditions, one perceives a strong personality. His life as a teacher was noteworthy for its capacity to inspire right principles of conduct; he was a passionate idealist, who drew to himself the affection and pride of his pupils. One of his comrades in many a yearly outing in California sums up his disposition by calling him "a genial, gentle, sincere, unaffected, deep-sighted, quick-witted, delightful, gifted, lovable, manful, communicating man." In this long concourse of friendly adjectives much stress, doubtless, is to be thrown upon the last. Sill loved to communicate, and it was this quality of his temperament which helped to make him a poet.

A real poet he unquestionably is: a "minor poet," if one chooses to insist upon distinctions of rank, yet with a message of his own, and a voice that is subtly differentiated from that of any other singer. He wrote in a private letter, the year before his death, "I know my Browning, Tennyson, Matthew Arnold,

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Emerson, far better than I do the ancients. And my Scott, Byron, Shelley and Wordsworth far better than the more ancient than they." This intimate knowledge of the greater English poets of the nineteenth century left its impress upon Sill's own productions, and among the names cited, Tennyson, Arnold, and Emerson seem to have influenced him most. But as with Lowell, whose nature was in many respects akin to Sill's, the inspiration that comes from books left upon the poet's work few traces of mere bookishness. He saw the world with his own eyes, and his verse was all the richer for his familiarity with the thought and the music of the masters. Some of the most characteristic phases of his poetry, such as its variety of mood and form, sensitiveness to the influences of nature, and the flawless purity of its spirit, are traits which attest his brotherhood with the representative authors of his country and his time. But the individual impression he has made thus far — and it should be remembered that Sill's fame is still crescent — is by virtue of the fine strenuousness, the noble temper, of such poems as *Opportunity* and *The Fool's Prayer*. Here are gallant courage, reverence, and enduring faith; an

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insight that divines the profoundest sources of human emotion and an art that expresses them with finished beauty.

The present edition gives the reader, for the first time, an opportunity to survey Sill's poetical productions in their entirety. It contains all the work included in the three volumes already published by Messrs. Houghton, Mifflin and Company, and, in addition to this, several poems hitherto uncollected, which are thought worthy of being placed among the rest, and which the increasing company of Sill's admirers are sure to welcome.

March, 1902.

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POEMS

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THE VENUS OF MILO

THERE fell a vision to Praxiteles :
Watching thro' drowsy lids the loitering seas
That lay caressing with white arms of foam
The sleeping marge of his Ionian home,
He saw great Aphrodite standing near,
Knew her, at last, the Beautiful he had sought
With lifelong passion, and in love and fear
Into unsullied stone the vision wrought.

Far other was the form that Cnidos gave
To senile Rome, no longer free or brave, —
The Medicean, naked like a slave.
The Cnidians built her shrine
Of creamy ivory fine ;
Most costly was the floor
Of scented cedar, and from door
Was looped to carven door
Rich stuff of Tyrian purple, in whose shade
Her glistening shoulders and round limbs outshone,
Milk-white as lilies in a summer moon.

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Here honey-hearted Greece to worship came,
And on her altar leaped a turbid flame.
The quickened blood ran dancing to its doom,
And lip sought trembling lip in that rich gloom.

But the island people of Cos, by the salt main
From Persia's touch kept clean,
Chose for their purer shrine amid the seas
That grander vision of Praxiteles.
Long ages after, sunken in the ground
Of sea-girt Melos, wondering shepherds found
The marred and dinted copy which men name
Venus of Milo, saved to endless fame.

Before the broken marble, on a day,
There came a worshiper: a slanted ray
Struck in across the dimness of her shrine
And touched her face as to a smile divine;
For it was like the worship of a Greek
At her old altar. Thus I heard him speak: —

Men call thee Love: is there no holier name
Than hers, the foam-born, laughter-loving dame?
Nay, for there is than love no holier name:

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All words that pass the lips of mortal men
With inner and with outer meaning shine;
An outer gleam that meets the common ken,
An inner light that but the few divine.
Thou art the love celestial, seeking still
The soul beneath the form; the serene will;
The wisdom, of whose deeps the sages dream;
The unseen beauty that doth faintly gleam
In stars, and flowers, and waters where they roll;
The unheard music whose faint echoes even
Make whosoever hears a homesick soul
Thereafter, till he follow it to heaven.

Larger than mortal woman I see thee stand,
With beautiful head bent forward steadily,
As if those earnest eyes could see
Some glorious thing far off, to which thy hand
Invisibly stretched onward seems to be.
From thy white forehead's breadth of calm, the hair
Sweeps lightly, as a cloud in windless air.
Placid thy brows, as that still line at dawn
Where the dim hills along the sky are drawn,
When the last stars are drowned in deeps afar.
Thy quiet mouth — I know not if it smile,

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Or if in some wise pity thou wilt weep,—
Little as one may tell, some summer morn,
Whether the dreamy brightness is most glad,
Or wonderfully sad,—
So bright, so still thy lips serenely sleep;
So fixedly thine earnest eyes the while,
As clear and steady as the morning star,
Their gaze upon that coming glory keep.

Thy garment's fallen folds
Leave beautiful the fair, round breast
In sacred loveliness; the bosom deep
Where happy babe might sleep;
The ample waist no narrowing girdle holds,
Where daughters slim might come to cling and rest,
Like tendriled vines against the plane-tree pressed.
Around thy firm, large limbs and steady feet
The robes slope downward, as the folded hills
Slope round the mountain's knees, when shadow fills
The hollow cañons, and the wind is sweet
From russet oat-fields and the ripening wheat.

From our low world no gods have taken wing;
Even now upon our hills the twain are wandering;

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The Medicean's sly and servile grace,
And the immortal beauty of thy face.
One is the spirit of all short-lived love
And outward, earthly loveliness:
The tremulous rosy morn is her mouth's smile,
The sky her langhing azure eyes above;
And, waiting for caress,
Lie bare the soft hill-slopes, the while
Her thrilling voice is heard
In song of wind and wave, and every flitting bird.
Not plainly, never quite herself she shows;
Just a swift glance of her illumined smile
Along the landscape goes;
Just a soft hint of singing, to beguile
A man from all his toil;
Some vanished gleam of beckoning arm, to spoil
A morning's task with longing wild and vain.
Then if across the parching plain
He seek her, she with passion burns
His heart to fever, and he hears
The west wind's mocking laughter when he turns,
Shivering in mist of ocean's sullen tears.
It is the Medicean: well I know
The arts her ancient subtlety will show;

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The stubble-fields she turns to ruddy gold;
The empty distance she will fold
In purple gauze: the warm glow she has kissed
Along the chilling mist:
Cheating and cheated love that grows to hate
And ever deeper loathing, soon or late.

Thou, too, O fairer spirit, walkest here
Upon the lifted hills:
Wherever that still thought within the breast
The inner beauty of the world hath moved;
In starlight that the dome of evening fills;
On endless waters rounding to the west:
For them who thro' that beauty's veil have loved
The soul of all things beautiful the best.
For lying broad awake, long ere the dawn,
Staring against the dark, the blank of space
Opens immeasurably, and thy face
Wavers and glimmers there and is withdrawn.
And many days, when all one's work is vain,
And life goes stretching on, a waste gray plain,
With even the short mirage of morning gone,
No cool breath anywhere, no shadow nigh
Where a weary man might lay him down and die,

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Lo! thou art there before me suddenly,
With shade as if a summer cloud did pass,
And spray of fountains whispering to the grass.
Oh, save me from the haste and noise and heat
That spoil life's music sweet:
And from that lesser Aphrodite there —
Even now she stands
Close as I turn, and, O my soul, how fair!
Nay, I will heed not thy white beckoning hands,
Nor thy soft lips like the curled inner leaf
In a rosebud's breast, kissed languid by the sun,
Nor eyes like liquid gleams where waters run.
Yea, thou art beautiful as morn;
And even as I draw nigh
To scoff, I own the loveliness I scorn.
Farewell, for thou hast lost me: keep thy train
Of worshipers; me thou dost lure in vain:
The inner passion, pure as very fire,
Burns to light ash the earthlier desire.

O greater Aphrodite, unto thee
Let me not say farewell. What would Earth be
Without thy presence? Surely unto me
A lifelong weariness, a dull, bad dream.

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Abide with me, and let thy calm brows beam
Fresh hope upon me every amber dawn,
New peace when evening's violet veil is drawn.
Then, tho' I see along the glooming plain
The Medicean's waving hand again,
And white feet glimmering in the harvest-field,
I shall not turn, nor yield;
But as heaven deepens, and the Cross and Lyre
Lift up their stars beneath the Northern Crown,
Unto the yearning of the world's desire
I shall be 'ware of answer coming down;
And something, when my heart the darkness stills,
Shall tell me, without sound or any sight,
That other footsteps are upon the hills;
Till the dim earth is luminous with the light
Of the white dawn, from some far-hidden shore,
That shines upon thy forehead evermore.

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FIELD NOTES[1]

I

By the wild fence-row, all grown up
With tall oats, and the buttercup,
And the seeded grass, and blue flax-flower,
I fling myself in a nest of green,
Walled about and all unseen,
And lose myself in the quiet hour.
Now and then from the orchard-tree
To the sweet clover at my knee
Hums the crescendo of a bee,
Making the silence seem more still;
Overhead on a maple prong
The least of birds, a jeweled sprite,
With burnished throat and needle bill,
Wags his head in the golden light,
Till it flashes, and dulls, and flashes bright,
Cheeping his microscopic song.

[1] Written for the graduating class of 1882, at Smith College, Northampton, Mass. It is a pleasant custom at that college for each class to send abroad and invite some one to celebrate its entrance into the greater world.

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II

Far up the hill-farm, where the breeze
Dips its wing in the billowy grain,
Waves go chasing from the plain
On softly undulating seas;
Now near my nest they swerve and turn,
And now go wandering without aim;
Or yonder, where the poppies burn,
Race up the slope in harmless flame.
Sometimes the bold wind sways my walls,
My four green walls of the grass and oats,
But never a slender column falls,
And the blue sky-roof above them floats.
Cool in the glowing sun I feel
On wrist and cheek the sea-breeze steal
From the wholesome ocean brine.
The air is full of the whispering pine,
Surf-sound of an aerial sea;
And the light clashing, near and far,
As of mimic shield and scimitar,
Of the slim Australian tree.

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III

So all that azure day
In the lap of the green world I lay;
And drinking of the sunshine's flood,
Like Sigurd when the dragon's blood
Made the bird-songs understood,
Inward or outward I could hear
A murmuring of music near;
And this is what it seemed to say: —

IV

Old earth, how beautiful thou art!
Though restless fancy wander wide
And sigh in dreams for spheres more blest,
Save for some trouble, half-confessed,
Some least misgiving, all my heart
With such a world were satisfied.
Had every day such skies of blue,
Were men all wise, and women true,
Might youth as calm as manhood be,
And might calm manhood keep its lore

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And still be young — and one thing more,
Old earth were fair enough for me.

Ah, sturdy world, old patient world!
Thou hast seen many times and men;
Heard jibes and curses at thee hurled
From cynic lip and peevish pen.
But give the mother once her due:
Were women wise, and men all true —
And one thing more that may not be,
Old earth were fair enough for me.

V

If only we were worthier found
Of the stout ball that bears us round!
New wants, new ways, pert plans of change,
New answers to old questions strange;
But to the older questions still
No new replies have come, or will.
New speed to buzz abroad and see
Cities where one needs not to be;
But no new way to dwell at home,
Or there to make great friendships come;

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No novel way to seek or find
True hearts and the heroic mind.
Of atom force and chemic stew
Nor Socrates nor Cæsar knew,
But the old ages knew a plan —
The lost art — how to mould a man.

VI

World, wise old world,
What may man do for thee?
Thou that art greater than all of us,
What wilt thou do to me?
This glossy curve of the tall grass-spear —
Can I make its lustrous green more clear?
This tapering shaft of oat, that knows
To grow erect as the great pine grows,
And to sway in the wind as well as he —
Can I teach it to nod more graciously?
The lark on the mossy rail so nigh,
Wary, but pleased if I keep my place —
Who could give a single grace
To his flute-note sweet and high,
Or help him find his nest hard by?

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Can I add to the poppy's gold one bit?
Can I deepen the sky, or soften it?

VII

Æons ago a rock crashed down
From a mountain's crown,
Where a tempest's tread
Crumbled it from its hold.
Ages dawn and in turn grow old:
The rock lies still and dead.
Flames come and floods come,
Sea rolls this mountain crumb
To a pebble, in its play;
Till at the last man came to be,
And a thousand generations passed away.
Then from the bed of a brook one day
A boy with the heart of a king
Fitted the stone to his shepherd sling,
And a giant fell, and a royal race was free.
Not out of any cloud or sky
Will thy good come to prayer or cry.
Let the great forces, wise of old,
Have their whole way with thee,

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Crumble thy heart from its hold,
Drown thy life in the sea.
And æons hence, some day,
The love thou gavest a child,
The dream in a midnight wild,
The word thou wouldst not say—
Or in a whisper no one dared to hear,
Shall gladden the earth and bring the golden year.

VIII

Just now a spark of fire
Flashed from a builder's saw
On the ribs of a roof a mile away.
His has been the better day,
Gone not in dreams, nor even the subtle desire
Not to desire;
But work is the sober law
He knows well to obey.
It is a poem he fits and fashions well;
And the five chambers are five acts of it:
Hope in one shall dwell,
In another fear will sit;
In the chamber on the east

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Shall be the bridal feast;
In the western one
The dead shall lie alone.
So the cycles of life shall fill
The clean, pine-scented rooms where now he
works his will.

IX

Might one be healed from fevering thought,
And only look, each night,
On some plain work well wrought,
Or if a man as right and true might be
As a flower or tree!
I would give up all the mind
In the prim city's hoard can find —
House with its scrap-art bedight,
Straitened manners of the street,
Smooth-voiced society —
If so the swiftness of the wind
Might pass into my feet;
If so the sweetness of the wheat
Into my soul might pass,
And the clear courage of the grass;

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If the lark caroled in my song;
If one tithe of the faithfulness
Of the bird-mother with her brood
Into my selfish heart might press,
And make me also instinct-good.

X

Life is a game the soul can play
With fewer pieces than men say.
Only to grow as the grass grows,
Prating not of joys or woes;
To burn as the steady hearth-fire burns;
To shine as the star can shine,
Or only as the mote of dust that turns
Darkling and twinkling in the beam of light divine;
And for my wisdom — glad to know
Where the sweetest beech-nuts grow,
And to track out the spicy root,
Or peel the musky core of the wild-berry shoot;
And how the russet ground-bird bold
With both slim feet at once will lightly rake the
mould;
And why moon-shadows from the swaying limb

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Here are sharp and there are dim ;
And how the ant his zigzag way can hold
Through the grass that is a grove to him.

'T were good to live one's life alone.
So to share life with many a one :
To keep a thought seven years, and then
Welcome it coming to you
On the way from another's brain and pen,
So to judge if it be true.
Then would the world be fair,
Beautiful as is the past,
Whose beauty we can see at last,
Since self no more is there.

XI

I will be glad to be and do,
And glad of all good men that live,
For they are woof of nature too ;
Glad of the poets every one,
Pure Longfellow, great Emerson,
And all that Shakespeare's world can give.
When the road is dust, and the grass dries,

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Then will I gaze on the deep skies ;
And if Dame Nature frown in cloud,
Well, mother — then my heart shall say —
You cannot so drive me away ;
I will still exult aloud,
Companioned of the good hard ground,
Whereon stout hearts of every clime,
In the battles of all time,
Foothold and couch have found.

XII

Joy to the laughing troop
That from the threshold starts,
Led on by courage and immortal hope,
And with the morning in their hearts.
They to the disappointed earth shall give
The lives we meant to live,
Beautiful, free, and strong ;
The light we almost had
Shall make them glad ;
The words we waited long
Shall run in music from their voice and song.
Unto our world hope's daily oracles

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From their lips shall be brought;
And in our lives love's hourly miracles
By them be wrought.
Their merry task shall be
To make the house all fine and sweet
Its new inhabitants to greet,
The wondrous dawning century.

XIII

And now the close of this fair day was come;
The bay grew duskier on its purple floor,
And the long curve of foam
Drew its white net along a dimmer shore.
Through the fading saffron light,
Through the deepening shade of even,
The round earth rolled into the summer night,
And watched the kindling of the stars in heaven.

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FIRST LOVE AND FANTASY

Hid in the silence of a forest deep
Dwelt a fair soul, in flesh that was as fair.
Over her nimble hands her floating hair
Made waving shadows, while her eyes did keep
The winding track of weavery intricate.
Early at morn, and at the evening late,
A robe of shimmering silk she wove with care.
Hour after hour, though might she smile or weep,
Still ran the golden or the glooming thread.
Waking, she wove that which she dreamed asleep,
Till many a moon had bloomed and blanched above
her head.

Now when the time was full, the robe was done.
Light she would hold it in her loving hand,
And with wide eyes of wonder she would stand
For half the day, and turn it to the sun,
To see its gold lights shift and melt away
And grow again, and flash in myriad play.
Or, while it glimmered on each glossy strand,

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For half the night she held it to the moon ;
Or, sitting with it sleeked across her knee,
She would bend down above it, and would croon
The strangest bits of broken songs that e'er could be.

Then came the dawn when (so her doom had said)
Out through the shadowy forest she must go,
And follow wheresoever chance might show,
Or whither any sound her footsteps led ;
Taking for wayward guides whatever stirred —
The rustling squirrel, or the startled bird,
Their pathless ways pursuing, fast or slow —
Until the forest's border she should tread.
There, whosoever met her, she must fling
That woven wonder blindly o'er his head,
And see in him forevermore her lord and king.

Dim was the morn, and dew-wet was the way :
Aloft the ancient cedars lifted high
Their jagged crosses on the brightening sky :
Below, the gossamers were glimmering gray
Along her path, and many a silver thread
Caught glancing lights, in floating curves o'erhead ;
And little dew-showers pattered far and nigh,

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Where wakened thrushes stirred the sprinkled spray.
For hours she wandered where her footsteps led,
Till a long glance of open sunlight lay
As red as gold upon her lifted, eager head.

Ah, woe for her, that mortal doom must be!
Just then the prince came spurring, fair and young,
With heart as merry as the song he sung;
But when she started forward, at her knee
A cringing beggar from the weeds close by
Holds up his cap for alms, with whining cry.
Swift over him the lifted robe was flung:
Henceforth, his slave, forever she must see
All princely beauty in that brutal face —
Heaven send that by some deeper witchery
His meagre soul through her may gain its touch of
grace!

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MORNING

I ENTERED once, at break of day,
A chapel, lichen-stained and gray,
Where a congregation dozed and heard
An old monk read from a written Word.
No light through the window-panes could pass,
For shutters were closed on the rich stained-glass;
And in a gloom like the nether night
The monk read on by a taper's light.
Ghostly with shadows, that shrank and grew
As the dim light flared, were aisle and pew;
And the congregation that dozed around
Listened without a stir or sound —
Save one, who rose with wistful face,
And shifted a shutter from its place.
Then light flashed in like a flashing gem —
For dawn had come unknown to them —
And a slender beam, like a lance of gold,
Shot to the crimson curtain-fold,
Over the bended head of him
Who pored and pored by the taper dim;

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And it kindled over his wrinkled brow
Such words — "The law which was till now;"
And I wondered that, under that morning ray,
When night and shadow were scattered away,
The monk should bow his locks of white
By a taper's feebly flickering light —
Should pore, and pore, and never seem
To notice the golden morning-beam.

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LIFE

Forenoon and afternoon and night, — Forenoon,
And afternoon, and night,— Forenoon, and — what!
The empty song repeats itself. No more?
Yea, that is Life: make this forenoon sublime,
This afternoon a psalm, this night a prayer,
And Time is conquered, and thy crown is won.

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FAITH

The tree-top, high above the barren field,
Rising beyond the night's gray folds of mist,
Rests stirless where the upper air is sealed
To perfect silence, by the faint moon kiss'd.
But the low branches, drooping to the ground,
Sway to and fro, as sways funereal plume,
While from their restless depths low whispers sound—
"We fear, we fear the darkness and the gloom;
Dim forms beneath us pass and reappear,
And mournful tongues are menacing us here."

Then from the topmost bough falls calm reply —
"Hush, hush! I see the coming of the morn;
Swiftly the silent Night is passing by,
And in her bosom rosy Dawn is borne.
'T is but your own dim shadows that ye see,
'T is but your own low moans that trouble ye."

So Life stands, with a twilight world around;
Faith turned serenely to the steadfast sky,

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Still answering the heart that sweeps the ground,
Sobbing in fear, and tossing restlessly —
"Hush, hush! The Dawn breaks o'er the Eastern sea,
'T is but thine own dim shadow troubling thee."

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SOLITUDE

ALL alone — alone,
Calm, as on a kingly throne,
Take thy place in the crowded land,
Self-centred in free self-command.
Let thy manhood leave behind
The narrow ways of the lesser mind:
What to thee are its little cares,
The feeble love or the spite it bears?
Let the noisy crowd go by:
In thy lonely watch on high,
Far from the chattering tongues of men,
Sitting above their call or ken,
Free from links of manner and form
Thou shalt learn of the wingèd storm —
God shall speak to thee out of the sky.

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RETROSPECT

Nor all which we have been
  Do we remain,
Nor on the dial-hearts of men
  Do the years mark themselves in vain;
But every cloud that in our sky hath passed,
Some gloom or glory hath upon us cast;
And there have fallen from us, as we traveled,
  Many a burden of an ancient pain —
Many a tangled chord hath been unraveled,
  Never to bind our foolish heart again.
Old loves have left us lingeringly and slow,
As melts away the distant strain of low
Sweet music — waking us from troubled dreams,
Lulling to holier ones — that dies afar
On the deep night, as if by silver beams
Claspt to the trembling breast of some charmed star.
And we have stood and watched, all wistfully,
While fluttering hopes have died out of our lives,
As one who follows with a straining eye
A bird that far, far off fades in the sky,

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A little rocking speck — now lost; and still he strives
A moment to recover it — in vain;
Then slowly turns back to his work again.
But loves and hopes have left us in their place,
Thank God! a gentle grace,
A patience, a belief in His good time,
Worth more than all earth's joys to which we climb.

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CHRISTMAS IN CALIFORNIA

Can this be Christmas — sweet as May,
With drowsy sun, and dreamy air,
And new grass pointing out the way
For flowers to follow, everywhere?

Has Time grown sleepy at his post,
And let the exiled Summer back,
Or is it her regretful ghost,
Or witchcraft of the almanac?

While wandering breaths of mignonette
In at the open window come,
I send my thoughts afar, and let
Them paint your Christmas Day at home.

Glitter of ice, and glint of frost,
And sparkles in the crusted snow;
And hark! the dancing sleigh-bells, tost
The faster as they fainter grow.

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The creaking footsteps hurry past;
The quick breath dims the frosty air;
And down the crisp road slipping fast
Their laughing loads the cutters bear.

Penciled against the cold white sky,
Above the curling eaves of snow,
The thin blue smoke lifts lingeringly,
As loath to leave the mirth below.

For at the door a merry din
Is heard, with stamp of feathery feet,
And chattering girls come storming in,
To toast them at the roaring grate.

And then from muff and pocket peer,
And many a warm and scented nook,
Mysterious little bundles queer,
That, rustling, tempt the curious look.

Now broad upon the southern walls
The mellowed sun's great smile appears,
And tips the rough-ringed icicles
With sparks, that grow to glittering tears.

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Then, as the darkening day goes by,
  The wind gets gustier without,
And leaden streaks are on the sky,
  And whirls of snow are all about.

Soon firelight shadows, merry crew,
  Along the darkling walls will leap
And clap their hands, as if they knew
  A thousand things too good to keep.

Sweet eyes with home's contentment filled,
  As in the smouldering coals they peer,
Haply some wondering pictures build
  Of how I keep my Christmas here.

Before me, on the wide, warm bay,
  A million azure ripples run;
Round me the sprouting palm-shoots lay
  Their shining lances to the sun.

With glossy leaves that poise or swing,
  The callas their white cups unfold,
And faintest chimes of odor ring
  From silver bells with tongues of gold.

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A languor of deliciousness
Fills all the sea-enchanted clime;
And in the blue heavens meet, and kiss,
The loitering clouds of summer-time.

This fragrance of the mountain balm
From spicy Lebanon might be;
Beneath such sunshine's amber calm
Slumbered the waves of Galilee.

O wondrous gift, in goodness given,
Each hour anew our eyes to greet,
An earth so fair — so close to Heaven,
'T was trodden by the Master's feet.

And we — what bring we in return?
Only these broken lives, and lift
Them up to meet His pitying scorn,
As some poor child its foolish gift:

As some poor child on Christmas Day
Its broken toy in love might bring;
You could not break its heart and say
You cared not for the worthless thing?

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Ah, word of trust, His child! That child
  Who brought to earth the life divine,
Tells me the Father's pity mild
  Scorns not even such a gift as mine.

I am His creature, and His air
  I breathe, where'er my feet may stand;
The angels' song rings everywhere,
  And all the earth is Holy Land.

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AMONG THE REDWOODS

FAREWELL to such a world! Too long I press
The crowded pavement with unwilling feet.
Pity makes pride, and hate breeds hatefulness,
And both are poisons. In the forest, sweet
The shade, the peace! Immensity, that seems
To drown the human life of doubts and dreams.

Far off the massive portals of the wood,
Buttressed with shadow, misty-blue, serene,
Waited my coming. Speedily I stood
Where the dun wall rose roofed in plumy green.
Dare one go in? — Glance backward! Dusk as night
Each column, fringed with sprays of amber light.

Let me, along this fallen bole, at rest,
Turn to the cool, dim roof my glowing face.
Delicious dark on weary eyelids prest!
Enormous solitude of silent space,
But for a low and thunderous ocean sound,
Too far to hear, felt thrilling through the ground.

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No stir nor call the sacred hush profanes ;
  Save when from some bare treetop, far on high,
Fierce disputations of the clamorous cranes
  Fall muffled, as from out the upper sky.
So still, one dreads to wake the dreaming air,
Breaks a twig softly, moves the foot with care.

The hollow dome is green with empty shade,
  Struck through with slanted shafts of afternoon ;
Aloft, a little rift of blue is made,
  Where slips a ghost that last night was the moon ;
Beside its pearl a sea-cloud stays its wing,
Beneath a tilted hawk is balancing.

The heart feels not in every time and mood
  What is around it. Dull as any stone
I lay ; then, like a darkening dream, the wood
  Grew Karnak's temple, where I breathed alone
In the awed air strange incense, and uprose
Dim, monstrous columns in their dread repose.

The mind not always sees ; but if there shine
  A bit of fern-lace bending over moss,
A silky glint that rides a spider-line,
  On a trefoil two shadow-spears that cross,

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Three grasses that toss up their nodding heads,
With spring and curve like clustered fountain-
threads, —

Suddenly, through side windows of the eye,
Deep solitudes, where never souls have met;
Vast spaces, forest corridors that lie
In a mysterious world, unpeopled yet.
Because the outward eye elsewhere was caught,
The awfulness and wonder come unsought.

If death be but resolving back again
Into the world's deep soul, this is a kind
Of quiet, happy death, untouched by pain
Or sharp reluctance. For I feel my mind
Is interfused with all I hear and see;
As much a part of All as cloud or tree.

Listen! A deep and solemn wind on high;
The shafts of shining dust shift to and fro;
The columned trees sway imperceptibly,
And creak as mighty masts when trade-winds blow.
The cloudy sails are set; the earth-ship swings
Along the sea of space to grander things.

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OPPORTUNITY

This I beheld, or dreamed it in a dream: —
There spread a cloud of dust along a plain;
And underneath the cloud, or in it, raged
A furious battle, and men yelled, and swords
Shocked upon swords and shields. A prince's banner
Wavered, then staggered backward, hemmed by foes.
A craven hung along the battle's edge,
And thought, "Had I a sword of keener steel —
That blue blade that the king's son bears, — but this
Blunt thing —!" he snapt and flung it from his hand,
And lowering crept away and left the field.
Then came the king's son, wounded, sore bestead,
And weaponless, and saw the broken sword,
Hilt-buried in the dry and trodden sand,
And ran and snatched it, and with battle-shout
Lifted afresh he hewed his enemy down,
And saved a great cause that heroic day.

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HOME

THERE lies a little city in the hills;
White are its roofs, dim is each dwelling's door,
And peace with perfect rest its bosom fills.

There the pure mist, the pity of the sea,
Comes as a white, soft hand, and reaches o'er
And touches its still face most tenderly.

Unstirred and calm, amid our shifting years,
Lo! where it lies, far from the clash and roar,
With quiet distance blurred, as if thro' tears.

O heart, that prayest so for God to send
Some loving messenger to go before
And lead the way to where thy longings end,

Be sure, be very sure, that soon will come
His kindest angel, and through that still door
Into the Infinite love will lead thee home.

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GOOD NEWS

'T is just the day to hear good news:
The pulses of the world are still;
The eager spring's unfolding hues
Are drowned in floods of sun, that fill
The golden air, and softly bear
Deep sleep and silence everywhere.
No ripple runs along that sea
Of warm, new grass, but all things wear
A hush of calm expectancy:
What is coming to Heart and me?

The idle clouds, that work their wills
In moods of shadow, on the hills;
The dusky hollows in the trees,
Veiled with their sunlit 'broideries;
The gate that has not swung, all day;
The dappled water's drowsy gleam;
The tap of hammers far away,
And distant voices, like a dream, —
All seem but visions, and a tone
Haunts them of tidings they refuse:

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So, all the quiet afternoon,
Heart and I we sit alone,
  Waiting for some good news.

Other days had life to spare,
  Tasks to do, and men to meet,
Trifling wishes, bits of care,
  A hundred ways for ready feet;
  But this bright day is all so sweet,
So sweet, 't is sad in its content;
As if kind Nature, as she went
Her happy way, had paused a space,
Remembered us, and turned her face
  As toward some protest of distress;
Waiting till we should find our place
  In the wide world's happiness.
Nothing stirs but some vague scent,
  A breath of hidden violet —
The lonely last of odors gone —
  Still lingering from the morning dews,
As if it were the earth's regret
For other such bright days that went,
While Heart and I we sat alone,
  Waiting for our good news.

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What would you have for your good news,
  Foolish Heart, O foolish Heart?
Some new freedom to abuse,
  Some old trouble to depart?
Sudden flash of snowy wing
Out of yonder blue, to bring
Messages so long denied?
The old greeting at your side,
The old hunger satisfied?

Nay, the distant will not come;
To deaf ears all songs are dumb:
  Silly Heart, O silly Heart!
From within joy must begin —
  What could help the thing thou art?
Nothing draweth from afar,
The gods can give but what we are.
Heaven makes the mould, but soon and late
Man pours the metal — that is Fate.
We must speak the word we wait,
  And give the gift we die to own.
  Wake, O Heart! From us alone
    Can come our best good news.

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REVERIE

Whether 't was in that dome of evening sky,
So hollow where the few great stars were bright,
Or something in the cricket's lonely cry,
Or, farther off, where swelled upon the night
The surf-beat of the symphony's delight,
Then died in crumbling cadences away —
A dream of Schubert's soul, too sweet to stay :

Whether from these, or secret spell within, —
It seemed an empty waste of endless sea,
Where the waves mourned for what had never been,
Where the wind sought for what could never be :
Then all was still, in vast expectancy
Of powers that waited but some mystic sign
To touch the dead world to a life divine.

Me, too, it filled — that breathless, blind desire ;
And every motion of the oars of thought
Thrilled all the deep in flashes — sparks of fire
In meshes of the darkling ripples caught,

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Swiftly rekindled, and then quenched to naught;
And the dark held me; wish and will were none:
A soul unformed and void, silent, alone,
And brooded over by the Infinite One.

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SPRING

When is it Spring? When spirits rise,
Pure crocus-buds, where the snow dies;
When children play outdoors till dark;
When the sap trickles up the bark;
When bits of blue sky flit and sing,
Playing at birds — then is it Spring?

When is it Spring? When the bee hums;
When through the opened window comes
The breeze, and summer-license claims
To swing and toss the picture frames;
When the walk dries; the robins call;
The brown hens doze by the sunny wall,
One foot drawn up to warm, or sing
With half-filmed eyes — then is it Spring?

Nay, each might prove a treacherous sign:
But when old waters seem new wine;
When all our mates are half divine;
When love comes easier than hate;

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When we have no more shrugs at Fate,
But think sometimes of God, and late
Our swiftest serving seems to be;
When bright ways numberless we see,
And thoughts spring up, and hopes run free,
And wild new dreams are all on wing,
Till we must either fly or sing
With riotous life — be sure 't is Spring.

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FIVE LIVES

Five mites of monads dwelt in a round drop
That twinkled on a leaf by a pool in the sun.
To the naked eye they lived invisible;
Specks, for a world of whom the empty shell
Of a mustard-seed had been a hollow sky.

One was a meditative monad, called a sage;
And, shrinking all his mind within, he thought:
"Tradition, handed down for hours and hours,
Tells that our globe, this quivering crystal world,
Is slowly dying. What if, seconds hence,
When I am very old, yon shimmering dome
Come drawing down and down, till all things end?"
Then with a weazen smirk he proudly felt
No other mote of God had ever gained
Such giant grasp of universal truth.

One was a transcendental monad; thin
And long and slim in the mind; and thus he mused:
"Oh, vast, unfathomable monad-souls!

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Made in the image" — a hoarse frog croaks from the
pool —
"Hark! 't was some god, voicing his glorious thought
In thunder music! Yea, we hear their voice,
And we may guess their minds from ours, their work.
Some taste they have like ours, some tendency
To wriggle about, and munch a trace of scum."
He floated up on a pin-point bubble of gas
That burst, pricked by the air, and he was gone.

One was a barren-minded monad, called
A positivist; and he knew positively:
"There is no world beyond this certain drop.
Prove me another! Let the dreamers dream
Of their faint dreams, and noises from without,
And higher and lower; life is life enough."
Then swaggering half a hair's breadth, hungrily
He seized upon an atom of bug, and fed.

One was a tattered monad, called a poet;
And with shrill voice ecstatic thus he sang:
"Oh, the little female monad's lips!
Oh, the little female monad's eyes!
Ah, the little, little, female, female monad!"

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The last was a strong-minded monadess,
Who dashed amid the infusoria,
Danced high and low, and wildly spun and dove
Till the dizzy others held their breath to see.

But while they led their wondrous little lives
Æonian moments had gone wheeling by.
The burning drop had shrunk with fearful speed;
A glistening film — 't was gone; the leaf was dry.
The little ghost of an inaudible squeak
Was lost to the frog that goggled from his stone;
Who, at the huge, slow tread of a thoughtful ox
Coming to drink, stirred sideways fatly, plunged,
Launched backward twice, and all the pool was still.

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TRANQUILLITY

WEARY, and marred with care and pain
And bruising days, the human brain
Draws wounded inward, — it might be
Some delicate creature of the sea,
That, shuddering, shrinks its lucent dome,
And coils its azure tendrils home,
And folds its filmy curtains tight
At jarring contact, e'er so light;
But let it float away all free,
And feel the buoyant, supple sea
Among its tinted streamers swell,
Again it spreads its gauzy wings,
And, waving its wan fringes, swings
With rhythmic pulse its crystal bell.

So let the mind, with care o'erwrought,
Float down the tranquil tides of thought:
Calm visions of unending years
Beyond this little moment's fears;
Of boundless regions far from where

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The girdle of the azure air
Binds to the earth the prisoned mind.
Set free the fancy, till it find
Beyond our world a vaster place
To thrill and vibrate out through space, —
As some auroral banner streams
Up through the night in pulsing gleams,
And floats and flashes o'er our dreams;
There let the whirling planet fall
Down — down, till but a glimmering ball,
A misty star: and dwindled so,
There is no room for care, or woe,
Or wish, apart from that one Will
That doth the worlds with music fill.

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MY PEACE THOU ART

My peace thou art, thou art my rest;
From thee my pain, in thee so blest:
Enter mine eyes, this heart draw near,
Oh come, oh dwell forever here.

Enter, and close the door, and come,
And be this breast thine endless home;
Shut out all lesser care and woe,
I would thy hurt and healing know.

Clear light that on my soul hath shone,
Still let it shine from thee alone,
From thee alone.

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HER FACE

I stood in sombre dreaming
Before her image dear,
And saw, in secret wonder,
Living my darling appear.

About her mouth a smile came,
So wonderful and wise,
And tears of some still sorrow
Seemed shining in her eyes.

My tears, they too were flowing,
Her face I could not see,
And oh! I cannot believe it,
That my love is lost to me.

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DARE YOU?

Doubting Thomas and loving John,
Behind the others walking on : —

"Tell me now, John, dare you be
One of the minority?
To be lonely in your thought,
Never visited nor sought,
Shunned with secret shrug, to go
Through the world esteemed its foe;
To be singled out and hissed,
Pointed at as one unblessed,
Warned against in whispers faint,
Lest the children catch a taint;
To bear off your titles well, —
Heretic and infidel?
If you dare, come now with me,
Fearless, confident, and free."

"Thomas, do you dare to be
Of the great majority?

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To be only, as the rest,
With Heaven's common comforts blessed;
To accept, in humble part,
Truth that shines on every heart;
Never to be set on high,
Where the envious curses fly;
Never name or fame to find,
Still outstripped in soul and mind;
To be hid, unless to God,
As one grass-blade in the sod,
Underfoot with millions trod?
If you dare, come with us be
Lost in love's great unity."

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THE INVISIBLE

If there is naught but what we see,
What is the wide world worth to me?
But is there naught save what we see?
A thousand things on every hand
My sense is numb to understand:
I know we eddy round the sun;
When has it dizzied any one?
I know the round worlds draw from far,
Through hollow systems, star to star;
But who has e'er upon a strand
Of those great cables laid his hand?
What reaches up from room to room
Of chambered earth, through glare or gloom,
Through molten flood and fiery blast,
And binds our hurrying feet so fast?
'T is the earth-mother's love, that well
Will hold the motes that round her dwell:
Through granite hills you feel it stir
As lightly as through gossamer:
Its grasp unseen by mortal eyes,
Its grain no lens can analyze.

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If there is naught but what we see,
The friend I loved is lost to me:
He fell asleep; who dares to say
His spirit is so far away?
Who knows what wings are round about?
These thoughts — who proves but from without
They still are whispered? Who can think
They rise from morning's food and drink!
These thoughts that stream on like the sea,
And darkly beat incessantly
The feet of some great hope, and break,
And only broken glimmers make,
Nor ever climb the shore, to lie
And calmly mirror the far sky,
And image forth in tranquil deeps
The secret that its silence keeps.

Because he never comes, and stands
And stretches out to me both hands,
Because he never leans before
The gate, when I set wide the door
At morning, nor is ever found
Just at my side when I turn round,
Half thinking I shall meet his eyes,

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From watching the broad moon-globe rise, —
For all this, shall I homage pay
To Death, grow cold of heart, and say:
"He perished, and has ceased to be;
Another comes, but never he"?
Nay, by our wondrous being, nay!
Although his face I never see
Through all the infinite To Be,
I know he lives and cares for me.

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A DRIFTING CLOUD

Born of the shadows that it passes through,
  Incessantly becoming and destroyed,
Its form unchanged, its substance ever new,
  Builded from its own largess to the void;
Of steady purpose innerly aware,
Yet blindly borne upon the streaming air, —

Giving itself away, distributing
  Its own abundant heart in splendid showers,
But not impoverished, since its losses bring
  Perpetual renewing all the hours:
Drifting, sunlit or shadowed, to the sea, —
  O cloud, thou hast a human destiny!

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WORDSWORTH

A MOONLIT desert's yellow sands,
Where, dimmer than its shadow, stands
A motionless palm-tree here and there,
And the great stars through amber air
Burn calm as planets, and the face
Of earth seems lifting into space: —

A tropic ocean's starlit rest,
Along whose smooth and sleeping breast
Slow swells just stir the mirrored gleams,
Like faintest sighs in placid dreams;
All overhead the night, so high
And hollow that there seems no sky,
But the unfathomed deeps, among
The worlds down endless arches swung: —

On moonlit plain, and starlit sea,
Is life's lost charm, tranquillity.

A poet found it once, and took
It home, and hid it in a book,

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As one might press a violet.
There still the odor lingers yet
Delicious; from your treasured tomes
Reach down your Wordsworth, and there comes
That fragrance which no bard but he
E'er caught, as if the plain and sea
Had yielded their serenity.

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PEACE

'T is not in seeking,
'T is not in endless striving,
  Thy quest is found:
Be still and listen;
Be still and drink the quiet
  Of all around.

Not for thy crying,
Not for thy loud beseeching,
  Will peace draw near:
Rest with palms folded;
Rest with thine eyelids fallen —
  Lo! peace is here.

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THE HOUSE AND THE HEART

Every house with its garret;
Lumbered with rubbish and relics —
Spinning-wheels leaning in corners,
Chests under spider-webbed rafters,
Brittle and yellow old letters,
Grandfather's things and grandmother's.
There overhead, at the midnight,
Noises of creaking and stepping
Startle the hush of the chambers —
Ghosts on their tip-toes repassing.
Every house with its garden;
Some little plot — a half-acre,
Or a mere strip by the windows,
Flower-beds and narrow box-borders,
Something spicily fragrant,
Something azure and golden.
There the small feet of the sparrow
Star the fresh mould round the roses;
And, in the shadowy moonlight,
Wonderful secrets are whispered.

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Every heart with its garret,
Cumbered with relics and rubbish —
Wheels that are silent forever,
Leaves that are faded and broken,
Foolish old wishes and fancies,
Cobwebs of doubt and suspicion —
Useless, unbeautiful, growing
Year by year thicker and faster:
Naught but a fire or a moving
Ever can clear it, or clean it.
Every heart with its garden;
Some little corner kept sacred,
Fragrant and pleasant with blossoms;
There the forget-me-nots cluster,
And pure love-violets, hidden,
Guessed but by sweetness all round them;
Some little strip in the sunshine,
Cheery and warm, for above it
Rest the deep, beautiful heavens,
Blue, and beyond, and forever.

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THE FOOL'S PRAYER

THE royal feast was done; the King
Sought some new sport to banish care,
And to his jester cried: "Sir Fool,
Kneel now, and make for us a prayer!"

The jester doffed his cap and bells,
And stood the mocking court before;
They could not see the bitter smile
Behind the painted grin he wore.

He bowed his head, and bent his knee
Upon the monarch's silken stool;
His pleading voice arose: "O Lord,
Be merciful to me, a fool!

"No pity, Lord, could change the heart
From red with wrong to white as wool;
The rod must heal the sin: but, Lord,
Be merciful to me, a fool!

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"'T is not by guilt the onward sweep
Of truth and right, O Lord, we stay;
'T is by our follies that so long
We hold the earth from heaven away.

"These clumsy feet, still in the mire,
Go crushing blossoms without end;
These hard, well-meaning hands we thrust
Among the heart-strings of a friend.

"The ill-timed truth we might have kept —
Who knows how sharp it pierced and stung?
The word we had not sense to say —
Who knows how grandly it had rung?

"Our faults no tenderness should ask,
The chastening stripes must cleanse them all;
But for our blunders — oh, in shame
Before the eyes of heaven we fall.

"Earth bears no balsam for mistakes;
Men crown the knave, and scourge the tool
That did his will; but Thou, O Lord,
Be merciful to me, a fool!"

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The room was hushed; in silence rose
The King, and sought his gardens cool,
And walked apart, and murmured low,
"Be merciful to me, a fool!"

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BUT FOR HIM

Dumb and still was the heart of man
By the river of Time:
Far it stretched, and wide and free,
This rapid river; on it ran,
Through many a land and many a clime,
On and on, and no tide turned,
Down and down to Eternity.

Dumb and still — but the man's heart yearned
For a voice to break the silence long;
And there by the side of the heart of man
Stood the spirit of Song.

Then the waves laughed
Down the river of Time;
And the west wind and the south wind sang,
And the world was glad,
For now it had
A voice to utter, in jocund chime,
The joy it quaffed
From the river of Time.

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But when the song grew low and sad,
The trees drooped,
The flowers were dim,
And a dark cloud down from heaven stooped;
The wind mourned, and tear-drops fell;
And the world cried, grieving, "But for him
We had not known but all was well!"

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A REPLY

To the mother of the world,
Not for help or light or grace,
Basely I for comfort came:
And I brought my craven fears,
Late amends of useless tears,
Brought my stumbling feet so lame,
Hopes with weary pinions furled,
Every longing unattained,
All my love with self-love stained, —
Told them to her grave, mild face.

And the mother of the world
Spake, and answered unto me,
In the brook that past me purled;
In the bluebird's heavenly hue,
When beyond his downward swerve
Up he glanced, a sweep of blue;
In the sunshine's shifting spray,
Drifted in beneath the tree
Where I sheltered, lest its flood

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There outside should drown my blood;
In the cloud-pearl's melting curve;
In the little odorous thrill
Trembling from each blossom-bell;
In the silence of the sky,
And the thoughts that from it fell,
Floating as a snowflake will, —
So the mother answered me:

"Child! it is not thine to see
Why at all thy life should be,
Wherefore thou must thus abide,
Foiled, repulsed, unsatisfied,
Thou hast not to prove thy right
To the earth-room and the light.
Thou hast not to justify
Thought of mine to human eye.
I have borne thee! Trust to me!
Strength and help are in thy deed;
Comfort thou shalt scorn to need.
Careless what shall come to thee,
Look but what thy work shall be."

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THE DESERTER

Blindest and most frantic prayer,
  Clutching at a senseless boon,
His that begs, in mad despair,
  Death to come; — he comes so soon!

Like a reveler that strains
  Lip and throat to drink it up —
The last ruby that remains,
  One red droplet in the cup.

Like a child that, sullen, mute,
  Sulking spurns, with chin on breast,
Of the Tree of Life a fruit,
  His gift of whom he is the guest.

Ontcast on the thither shore,
  Open scorn to him shall give
Souls that heavier burdens bore: —
  "See the wretch that dared not live!"

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THE REFORMER

Before the monstrous wrong he sets him down —
One man against a stone-walled city of sin.
For centuries those walls have been a-building;
Smooth porphyry, they slope and coldly glass
The flying storm and wheeling sun. No chink,
No crevice lets the thinnest arrow in.
He fights alone, and from the cloudy ramparts
A thousand evil faces gibe and jeer him.
Let him lie down and die: what is the right,
And where is justice, in a world like this?
But by and by, earth shakes herself, impatient;
And down, in one great roar of ruin, crash
Watch-tower and citadel and battlements.
When the red dust has cleared, the lonely soldier
Stands with strange thoughts beneath the friendly
stars.

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DESIRE OF SLEEP

It is not death I mean,
Nor even forgetfulness,
But healthful human sleep,
Dreamless, and still, and deep,
Where I would hide and glean
Some heavenly balm to bless.

I would not die; I long
To live, to see my days
Bud once again, and bloom,
And make amidst them room
For thoughts like birds of song,
Out-winging happy ways.

I would not even forget:
Only, a little while —
Just now — I cannot bear
Remembrance with despair;
The years are coming yet
When I shall look, and smile.

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Not now — oh, not to-night!
Too clear on midnight's deep
Come voice and hand and touch;
The heart aches overmuch —
Hush sounds! shut out the light!
A little I *must* sleep.

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HER EXPLANATION

So you have wondered at me, — guessed in vain
What the real woman is you know so well?
I am a lost illusion. Some strange spell
Once made your friend there, with his fine disdain
Of fact, conceive me perfect. He would fain
(But could not) see me always, as befell
His dream to see me, plucking asphodel,
In saffron robes, on some celestial plain.
All that I was he marred and flung away
In quest of what I was not, could not be, —
Lilith, or Helen, or Antigone.
Still he may search; but I have had my day,
And now the Past is all the part for me
That this world's empty stage has left to play.

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EVE'S DAUGHTER

I WAITED in the little sunny room:
  The cool breeze waved the window-lace, at play,
The white rose on the porch was all in bloom,
  And out upon the bay
I watched the wheeling sea-birds go and come.

"Such an old friend, — she would not make me stay
  While she bound up her hair." I turned, and lo,
Danaë in her shower! and fit to slay
  All a man's hoarded prudence at a blow:
Gold hair, that streamed away
  As round some nymph a sunlit fountain's flow.
"She would not make me wait!" — but well I know
  She took a good half-hour to loose and lay
Those locks in dazzling disarrangement so!

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BLINDFOLD

WHAT do we know of the world, as we grow so old
and wise?
Do the years, that still the heart-beats, quicken the
drowsy eyes?
At twenty we thought we knew it, — the world there,
at our feet;
We thought we had found its bitter, we knew we had
found its sweet.
Now at forty and fifty, what do we make of the
world?
There in her sand she crouches, the Sphinx with her
gray wings furled.
Soul of a man I know not; who knoweth, can fore-
tell,
And what can I read of fate, even of self I have
learned so well?
Heart of a woman I know not: how should I hope to
know,
I that am foiled by a flower, or the stars of the silent
snow;

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I that have never guessed the mind of the bright-eyed
bird,
Whom even the dull rocks cheat, and the whirlwind's
awful word?
Let me loosen the fillet of clay from the shut and
darkened lid,
For life is a blindfold game, and the Voice from view
is hid.
I face him as best I can, still groping, here and there,
For the hand that has touched me lightly, the lips that
have said, "Declare!"
Well, I declare him my friend, — the friend of the
whole sad race;
And oh, that the game were over, and I might see his
face!
But 't is much, though I grope in blindness, the Voice
that is hid from view
May be heard, may be even loved, in a dream that
may come true.

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RECALL

"LOVE me, or I am slain!" I cried, and meant
Bitterly true each word. Nights, morns, slipped by,
Moons, circling suns, yet still alive am I;
But shame to me, if my best time be spent

On this perverse, blind passion! Are we sent
Upon a planet just to mate and die,
A man no more than some pale butterfly
That yields his day to nature's sole intent?

Or is my life but Marguerite's ox-eyed flower,
That I should stand and pluck and fling away,
One after one, the petal of each hour,
Like a love-dreamy girl, and only say,
"Loves me," and "loves me not," and "loves me"?
Nay!
Let the man's mind awake to manhood's power.

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STRANGE

He died at night. Next day they came
To weep and praise him: sudden fame
These suddenly warm comrades gave.
They called him pure, they called him brave;
One praised his heart, and one his brain;
All said, You 'd seek his like in vain, —
Gentle, and strong, and good: none saw
In all his character a flaw.

At noon he wakened from his trance,
Mended, was well! They looked askance;
Took his hand coldly; loved him not,
Though they had wept him; quite forgot
His virtues; lent an easy ear
To slanderous tongues; professed a fear
He was not what he seemed to be;
Thanked God they were not such as he;
Gave to his hunger stones for bread;
And made him, living, wish him dead.

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WIEGENLIED

Be still and sleep, my soul!
Now gentle-footed Night
In softly shadowed stole,
Holds all the day from sight.

Why shouldst thou lie and stare
Against the dark, and toss,
And live again thy care,
Thine agony and loss?

'T was given thee to live,
And thou hast lived it all;
Let that suffice, nor give
One thought what may befall.

Thou hast no need to wake,
Thou art no sentinel;
Love all the care will take,
And Wisdom watcheth well.

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Weep not, think not, but rest!
The stars in silence roll;
On the world's mother-breast,
Be still and sleep, my soul!

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AN ANCIENT ERROR

He that has and a little tiny wit,—
With hey, ho, the wind and the rain.

LEAR

THE "sobbing wind," the "weeping rain,"—
'T is time to give the lie
To these old superstitions twain,
That poets sing and sigh.

Taste the sweet drops,—no tang of brine;
Feel them,—they do not burn;
The daisy-buds, whereon they shine,
Laugh, and to blossoms turn.

There is no natural grief or sin;
'T is we have flung the pall,
And brought the sound of sorrow in.
Pan is not dead at all.

The merry Pan! his blithesome look
Twinkles through sun and rain;

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By ivied rock and rippled brook
He pipes his jocund strain.

If winds have wailed and skies wept tears,
To poet's vision dim,
'T was that his own sobs filled his ears,
His weeping blinded him.

'T is laughing breeze and singing shower,
As ever heart could need;
And who with "hey" and "ho" must lower
Hath "tiny wit" indeed.

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TO A FACE AT A CONCERT

When the low music makes a dusk of sound
About us, and the viol or far-off horn
Swells out above it like a wind forlorn,
That wanders seeking something never found,
What phantom in your brain, on what dim ground,
Traces its shadowy lines? What vision, born
Of unfulfillment, fades in mere self-scorn,
Or grows, from that still twilight stealing round?
When the lids droop and the hands lie unstrung,
Dare one divine your dream, while the chords weave
Their cloudy woof from key to key, and die, —
Is it one fate that, since the world was young,
Has followed man, and makes him half believe
The voice of instruments a human cry?

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TWO VIEWS OF IT

"O WORLD, O glorious world, good-by!"
Time but to think it — one wild cry
Unuttered, a heart-wrung farewell
To sky and wood and flashing stream,
All gathered in a last swift gleam,
As the crag crumbled, and he fell.

But lo! the thing was wonderful!
After the echoing crash, a lull:
The great fir on the slope below
Had spread its mighty mother-arm,
And caught him, springing like a bow
Of steel, and lowered him safe from harm.

'T was but an instant's dark and daze:
Then, as he felt each limb was sound,
And slowly from the swooning haze
The dizzy trees stood still that whirled,
And the familiar sky and ground,
There grew with them across his brain
A dull regret: "So, world, dark world,
You are come back again!"

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THE LINKS OF CHANCE

Holding apoise in air
My twice-dipped pen, — for some tense thread of thought
Had snapped, — mine ears were half aware
Of passing wheels ; eyes saw, but mind saw not,
My sun-shot linden. Suddenly, as I stare,
Two shifting visions grow and fade unsought : —

Noon-blaze : the broken shade
Of ruins strown. Two Tartar lovers sit :
She gazing on the ground, face turned, afraid ;
And he, at her. Silence is all his wit.
She stoops, picks up a pebble of green jade
To toss : they watch its flight, unheeding it.

Ages have rolled away ;
And round the stone, by chance, if chance there be,
Sparse soil has caught ; a seed, wind-lodged one day,
Grown grass ; shrubs sprung ; at last a tufted tree :
Lo ! over its snake root yon conquering Bey
Trips backward, fighting — and half Asia free !

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"WORDS, WORDS, WORDS"

(TO ONE WHO FLOUTED THEM AS VAIN)

I

Am I not weary of them as your heart
Or ever Hamlet's was? — the empty ones,
Mere breath of passing air, mere hollow tones
That idle winds to broken reeds impart.

Have they not cursed my life? — sounds I mistook
For sacred verities, — love, faith, delight,
And the sweet tales that women tell at night,
When darkness hides the falsehood of the look.

I was the one of all Ulysses' crew
(What time he stopped their ears) that leaped and fled
Unto the sirens, for the honey-dew

Of their dear songs. The poets me have fed
With the same poisoned fruit. And even you, —
Did you not pluck them for me in days dead?

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II

Nay, they do bear a blessing and a power, —
Great words and true, that bridge from soul to soul
The awful cloud-depths that betwixt us roll.
I will not have them so blasphemed. This hour,

This little hour of life, this lean to-day, —
What were it worth but for those mighty dreams
That sweep from down the past on sounding streams
Of such high-thoughted words as poets say?

What, but for Shakespeare's and for Homer's lay,
And bards whose sacred names all lips repeat?
Words, — only words; yet, save for tongue and pen

Of those great givers of them unto men,
And burdens they still bear of grave or sweet,
This world were but for beasts, a darkling den.

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THE THRUSH

The thrush sings high on the topmost bough, —
Low, louder, low again; and now
He has changed his tree, — you know not how,
For you saw no flitting wing.

All the notes of the forest-throng,
Flute, reed, and string, are in his song;
Never a fear knows he, nor wrong,
Nor a doubt of anything.

Small room for care in that soft breast;
All weather that comes is to him the best,
While he sees his mate close on her nest,
And the woods are full of spring.

He has lost his last year's love, I know, —
He, too, — but 't is little he keeps of woe;
For a bird forgets in a year, and so
No wonder the thrush can sing.

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CARPE DIEM

How the dull thought smites me dumb,
"It will come!" and "It will come!"
But to-day I am not dead;
Life in hand and foot and head
Leads me on its wondrous ways.
'T is in such poor, common days,
Made of morning, noon, and night,
Golden truth has leaped to light,
Potent messages have sped,
Torches flashed with running rays,
World-runes started on their flight.

Let it come, when come it must;
But To-Day from out the dust
Blooms and brightens like a flower,
Fair with love, and faith, and power.
Pluck it with unclouded will,
From the great tree Igdrasil.

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SERVICE

Fret not that the day is gone,
And thy task is still undone.
'T was not thine, it seems, at all:
Near to thee it chanced to fall,
Close enough to stir thy brain,
And to vex thy heart in vain.
Somewhere, in a nook forlorn,
Yesterday a babe was born:
He shall do thy waiting task;
All thy questions he shall ask,
And the answers will be given,
Whispered lightly out of heaven.
His shall be no stumbling feet,
Falling where they should be fleet:
He shall hold no broken clue;
Friends shall unto him be true;
Men shall love him; falsehood's aim
Shall not shatter his good name.
Day shall nerve his arm with light,
Slumber soothe him all the night;

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Summer's peace and winter's storm
Help him all his will perform.
'T is enough of joy for thee
His high service to foresee.

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THE BOOK OF HOURS

As one who reads a tale writ in a tongue
He only partly knows, — runs over it
And follows but the story, losing wit
And charm, and half the subtle links among
The haps and harms that the book's folk beset, —
So do we with our life. Night comes, and morn:
I know that one has died and one is born;
That this by love and that by hate is met.
But all the grace and glory of it fail
To touch me, and the meanings they enfold.
The Spirit of the World hath told the tale,
And tells it: and 't is very wise and old.
But o'er the page there is a mist and veil:
I do not know the tongue in which 't is told.

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THE WONDERFUL THOUGHT

It comes upon me in the woods,
Of all the days, this day in May:
When wind and rain can never think
Whose turn 't is now to have its way.

It finds me as I lie along,
Blinking up through the swaying trees,
Half wondering if a man who reads
"Blue sky" in books *that* color sees, —

So fathomless and pure: as if
All loveliest azure things have gone
To heaven that way, — the flowers, the sea, —
And left their color there alone.

Hark! leaning on each other's arms,
The pines are whispering in the breeze,
Whispering, — then hushing, half in awe
Their legends of primeval seas.

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The wild things of the wood come out,
And stir or hide, as wild things will,
Like thoughts that may not be pursued,
But come if one is calm and still.

Deep hemlocks down the gorge shut in
Their caves with hollow shadow filled,
Where little feathered anchorites
Behind a sunlit lattice build.

And glimmering through that lace of boughs,
Dancing, while they hang darker still,
Along the restful river shines
The restless light's incessant thrill:

As in some sober, silent soul,
Whose life appears a tranquil stream,
Through some unguarded rift you catch
The wildest wishes, all agleam.

But to my thought — so wonderful!
I know if once 't were told, all men
Would feel it warm at heart, and life
Be more than it had ever been.

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'T would make these flowerless woods laugh out
With every garden-color bright,
Where only, now, the dogwood hangs
Its scattered cloud of ghostly white.

Those birds would hold no more aloof: —
How know they I am here, so well?
'T is yon woodpecker's warning note;
He is their seer and sentinel.

They use him, but his faithfulness
Perchance in human fashion pay, —
Laugh in their feathers at his voice,
And ridicule his stumbling way.

That far-off flute-note — hours in vain
I 've followed it, so shy and fleet;
But if I found him, well I know
His song would seem not half so sweet.

The swift, soft creatures, — how I wish
They 'd trust me, and come perch upon
My shoulders! Do they guess that then
Their charm would be forever gone?

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But still I prate of sight and sound;
Ah, well, 't is always so in rhyme;
The idle fancies find a voice,
The wise thought waits — another time.

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NATURE AND HER CHILD

As some poor child whose soul is windowless,
Having not hearing, speech, nor sight, sits lone
In her dark, silent life, till cometh one
With a most patient heart, who tries to guess

Some hidden way to help her helplessness,
And, yearning for that spirit shut in stone,
A crystal that has never seen the sun,
Smooths now the hair, and now the hand will press,

Or gives a key to touch, then letters raised,
Its symbol; then an apple, or a ring,
And again letters, — so, all blind and dumb,
We wait; the kindly smiles of summer come,
And soft winds touch our cheek, and thrushes sing;
The world-heart yearns, but we stand dull and dazed.

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THE FOSTER-MOTHER

As some poor Indian woman
  A captive child receives,
And warms it in her bosom,
  And o'er its weeping grieves;

And comforts it with kisses,
  And strives to understand
Its eager, lonely babble,
  Fondling the little hand,—

So Earth, our foster-mother,
  Yearns for us, with her great
Wild heart, and croons in murmurs
  Low, inarticulate.

She knows we are white captives,
  Her dusky race above,
But the deep, childless bosom
  Throbs with its brooding love.

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TRUTH AT LAST

Does a man ever give up hope, I wonder,—
Face the grim fact, seeing it clear as day?
When Bennen saw the snow slip, heard its thunder
Low, louder, roaring round him, felt the speed
Grow swifter as the avalanche hurled downward,
Did he for just one heart-throb — did he indeed
Know with all certainty, as they swept onward,
There was the end, where the crag dropped away?
Or did he think, even till they plunged and fell,
Some miracle would stop them? Nay, they tell
That he turned round, face forward, calm and pale,
Stretching his arms out toward his native vale
As if in mute, unspeakable farewell,
And so went down. — 'T is something, if at last,
Though only for a flash, a man may see
Clear-eyed the future as he sees the past,
From doubt, or fear, or hope's illusion free.

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"QUEM METUI MORITURA?"

Æneid, IV. 604

What need have I to fear — so soon to die?
  Let me work on, not watch and wait in dread:
  What will it matter, when that I am dead,
That they bore hate or love who near me lie?
'T is but a lifetime, and the end is nigh
  At best or worst. Let me lift up my head
  And firmly, as with inner courage, tread
Mine own appointed way, on mandates high.
Pain could but bring, from all its evil store,
  The close of pain: hate's venom could but kill;
Repulse, defeat, desertion, could no more.
  Let me have lived my life, not cowered until
The unhindered and unhastened hour was here.
So soon — what is there in the world to fear?

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A MORNING THOUGHT

WHAT if some morning, when the stars were paling,
And the dawn whitened, and the East was clear,
Strange peace and rest fell on me from the presence
Of a benignant Spirit standing near:

And I should tell him, as he stood beside me,
"This is our Earth — most friendly Earth, and fair;
Daily its sea and shore through sun and shadow
Faithful it turns, robed in its azure air:

"There is blest living here, loving and serving,
And quest of truth, and serene friendships dear;
But stay not, Spirit! Earth has one destroyer, —
His name is Death: flee, lest he find thee here!"

And what if then, while the still morning brightened,
And freshened in the elm the Summer's breath,
Should gravely smile on me the gentle angel
And take my hand and say, "My name is Death."

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THE HERMITAGE

CALIFORNIA, BAY OF SAN FRANCISCO, 1866

I

A LIFE,—a common, cleanly, quiet life,
Full of good citizenship and repute,
New, but with promise of prosperity,—
A well-bred, fair, young-gentlemanly life,—
What business had a girl to bring her eyes,
And her blonde hair, and her clear, ringing voice,
And break up life, as a bell breaks a dream?
Had Love Christ's wrath, and did this life sell doves
In the world's temple, that Love scourged it forth
Beyond the gates? Within, the worshipers,—
Without, the waste, and the hill-country, where
The life, with smarting shoulders and stung heart,
Unknowing that the hand which scourged could heal,
Drave forth, blind, cursing, in despair to die,
Or work its own salvation out in fear.

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Old World—old, foolish, wicked World—farewell!
Since the Time-angel left my soul with thee,
Thou hast been a hard stepmother unto me.
Now I at last rebel
Against thy stony eyes and cruel hands.
I will go seek in far-off lands
Some quiet corner, where my years shall be
Still as the shadow of a brooding bird
That stirs but with her heart-beats. Far, unheard
May wrangle on the noisy human host,
While I will face my Life, that silent ghost,
And force it speak what it would have with me.

Not of the fair young Earth,
The snow-crowned, sunny-belted globe;
Not of its skies, nor Twilight's purple robe,
Nor pearly dawn; not of the flowers' birth,
And Autumn's forest-funerals; not of storms,
And quiet seas, and clouds' incessant forms;
Not of the sanctuary of the night,
With its solemnities, nor any sight
And pleasant sound of all the friendly day:
But I am tired of what we call our lives;
Tired of the endless humming in the hives,—

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Sick of the bitter honey that we eat,
And sick of cursing all the shallow cheat.

Let me arise, and away
To the land that guards the dying day,
Whose burning tear, the evening-star,
Drops silently to the wave afar;
The land where summers never cease
Their sunny psalm of light and peace.
Whose moonlight, poured for years untold,
Has drifted down in dust of gold;
Whose morning splendors, fallen in showers,
Leave ceaseless sunrise in the flowers.

There I will choose some eyrie in the hills,
Where I may build, like a lonely bird,
And catch the whispered music heard
Out of the noise of human ills.

So, I am here at last;
A purer world, whose feet the old, salt Past
Washes against, and leaves it fresh and free
As a new island risen from the sea.

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Three dreamy weeks we lay on Ocean's breast,
Rocked asleep, by gentle winds caressed,
Or crooned with wild wave-lullabies to rest.
A memory of foam and glassy spray;
Wave chasing wave, like young sea-beasts at play;
Stretches of misty silver 'neath the moon,
And night-airs murmuring many a quiet tune.
Three long, delicious weeks' monotony
Of sky, and stars, and sea,
Broken midway by one day's tropic scene
Of giant plants, tangles of luminous green,
With fiery flowers and purple fruits between.

I have found a spot for my hermitage,—
No dank and sunless cave,—
I come not for a dungeon, nor a cage,—
Not to be Nature's slave,
But, as a weary child,
Unto the mother's faithful arms I flee,
And seek the sunniest footstool at her knee,
Where I may sit beneath caresses mild,
And hear the sweet old songs that she will sing
to me.

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'T is a grassy mountain-nook,
In a gorge, whose foaming brook
Tumbles through from the heights above,
Merrily leaping to the light
From the pine-wood's haunted gloom,—
As a romping child,
Affrighted, from a sombre room
Leaps to the sunshine, laughing with delight:
Be this my home, by man's tread undefiled.
Here sounds no voice but of the mourning dove,
Nor harsher footsteps on the sands appear
Than the sharp, slender hoof-marks of the deer,
Or where the quail has left a zigzag row
Of lightly printed stars her track to show.

Above me frowns a front of rocky wall,
Deep cloven into ruined pillars tall
And sculptures strange ; bald to its dizzy edge,
Save where, in some deep crevice of a ledge
Buttressed by its black shadow hung below,
A solitary pine has cleft the rock,—
Straight as an arrow, feathered to the tip,
As if a shaft from the moon-huntress' bow
Had struck and grazed the cliff's defiant lip,
And stood, still stiffly quivering with the shock.

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Beyond the gorge a slope runs half-way up,
With hollow curve as for a giant's cup,
Brimming with blue pine-shadows: then in air
The gray rock rises bare,
Its front deep-fluted by the sculptor-storms
In moulded columns, rounded forms,
As if great organ-pipes were chiseled there,
Whose anthems are the torrent's roar below,
And chanting winds that through the pine-tops go.
Here bursts of requiem music sink and rise,
When the full moonlight, slowly streaming, lies
Like panes of gold on some cathedral pave,
While floating mists their silver incense wave,
And from on high, through fleecy window-bars,
Gaze down the saintly faces of the stars.

Against the huge trunk of a storm-snapped tree,
(Whose hollow, ready-hewn by long decay,
Above, a chimney, lined with slate and clay,
Below, a broad-arched fireplace makes for me,)
I 've built of saplings and long limbs a hut.
The roof with lacing boughs is tightly shut,
Thatched with thick-spreading palms of pine,
And tangled over by a wandering vine,

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Uprooted from the woods close by,
Whose clasping tendrils climb and twine,
Waving their little hands on high,
As if they loved to deck this nest of mine.
Within, by smooth white stones from the brook's
beach
My rooms are separated, each from each.
On yonder island-rock my table 's spread,
Brook-ringed, that no stray, fasting ant may come
To make himself with my wild fare at home.

Here will I live, and here my life shall be
Serene, still, rooted steadfastly,
Yet pointing skyward, and its motions keep
A rhythmic balance, as that cedar tall,
Whose straight shaft rises from the chasm there,
Through the blue, hollow air,
And, measuring the dizzy deep,
Leans its long shadow on the rock's gray wall.

Through the sharp gap of the gorge below,
From my mountains' feet the gaze may go
Over a stretch of fields, broad-sunned,

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Then glance beyond,
Across the beautiful bay,
To that dim ridge, a score of miles away,
Lifting its clear-cut outline high,
Azure with distance on the azure sky,
Whose flocks of white clouds brooding on its crests
Have winged from ocean to their piny nests.
Beyond the bright blue water's further rim,
Where waves seem ripples on its far-off brim,
The rich young city lies,
Diminished to an ant-hill's size.
I trace its steep streets, ribbing all the hill
Like narrow bands of steel,
Binding the city on the shifting sand:
Thick-pressed between them stand
Broad piles of buildings, pricked through here and there
By a sharp steeple; and above, the air
Murky with smoke and dust, that seem to show
The bright sky saddened by the sin below.

The voice of my wild brook is marvelous;
Leaning above it from a jutting rock

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To watch the image of my face, that forms
And breaks, and forms again (as the image of God
Is broken and re-gathered in a soul),
I listen to the chords that sink and swell
From many a little fall and babbling run.
That hollow gurgle is the deepest bass;
Over the pebbles gush contralto tones,
While shriller trebles tinkle merrily,
Running, like some enchanted-fingered flute,
Endless chromatics.
Now it is the hum
And roar of distant streets; the rush of winds
Through far-off forests: now the noise of rain
Drumming the roof; the hiss of ocean-foam:
Now the swift ripple of piano-keys
In mad mazurkas, danced by laughing girls.

So, night and day, the hurrying brook goes on;
Sometimes in noisy glee, sometimes far down,
Silent along the bottom of the gorge,
Like a deep passion hidden in the soul,
That chafes in secret hunger for its sea:
Yet not so still but that heaven finds its course;

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And not so hid but that the yearning night
Broods over it, and feeds it with her stars.

When earth has Eden spots like this for man,
Why will he drag his life where lashing storms
Whip him indoors, the petulant weather's slave?
There he is but a helpless, naked snail,
Except he wear his house close at his back.
Here the wide air builds him his palace walls, —
Some little corner of it roofed, for sleep;
Or he can lie all night, bare to the sky,
And feel updrawn against the breast of heaven,
Letting his thoughts stretch out among the stars,
As the antennæ of an insect grope
Blindly for food, or as the ivy's shoots
Clamber from cope and tower to find the light,
And drink the electric pulses of the sun.

As from that sun we draw the coarser fire
That swells the veins, and builds the brain and bone,
So from each star a finer influence streams,
Kindling within the mortal chrysalis
The first faint thrills of its new life to come.

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Here is no niggard gap of sky above,
With murk and mist below, but all sides clear,—
Not an inch bated from the full-swung dome;
Each constellation to the horizon's rim
Keen-glittering, as if one only need
Walk to the edge there, spread his wings, and float,
The dark earth spurned behind, into the blue.

I love thee, thou brown, homely, dear old Earth!
Those fairer planets whither fate may lead,
Whatever marvel be their bulk or speed,
Ringed with what splendor, belted round with fire,
In glory of perpetual moons arrayed,
Can ne'er give back the glow and fresh desire
Of youth in that old home where man had birth,
Whose paths he trod through wholesome light and shade.
Out of their silver radiance to thy dim
And clouded orb his eye will turn,
As an old man looks back to where he played
About his father's hearth, and finds for him
No splendor like the fires which there did burn.

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See: I am come to live alone with thee.
Thou hast had many a one, grown old and worn,
Come to thee weary and forlorn,
Bent with the weight of human vanity.
But I come with my life almost untried,
In thy perpetual presence to abide.
Teach me thy wisdom; let me learn the flowers,
And know the rocks and trees,
And touch the springs of all thy hidden powers.
Let the still gloom of thy rock-fastnesses
Fall deep upon my spirit, till the voice
Of brooks become familiar, and my heart rejoice
With joy of birds and winds; and all the hours,
Unmaddened by the babble of vain men,
Bring thy most inner converse to my ken.
So shall it be, that, when I stand
On that next planet's ruddy-shimmering strand,
I shall not seem a pert and forward child
Seeking to dabble in abstruser lore
With alphabet unlearned, who in disgrace
Returns, upon his primer yet to pore —
But those examiners, all wise and mild,
Shall gently lead me to my place,

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As one that faithfully did trace
These simpler earthly records o'er and o'er.

Beckoned at sunrise by the surf's white hand,
I have strayed down to sit upon the beach,
And hear the oratorio of the Sea.
On this steep, crumbling bank, where the high tides
Have crunched the earth away, a crooked oak —
A hunch-backed dwarf, whose limbs, cramped down
by gales,
Have twisted stiffening back upon themselves —
Spreads me a little arbor from the sun.

On the brown, shining beach, all ripple-carved,
Gleams now and then a pool; so smooth and clear,
That, though I cannot see the plover there
Pacing its farther edge (so much he looks
The color of the sand), yet I can trace
His image hanging in the glassy brine —
Slim legs and rapier-beak — like silver-plate
With such a pictured bird clean-etched upon it.

Beyond, long curves of little shallow waves
Creep, tremulous with ripples, to the shore,

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Till the whole bay seems slowly sliding in,
With edge of snow that melts against the sand.

Above its twinkling blue, where ceaselessly
The white curve of a slender arm of foam
Is reached along the water, and withdrawn,
A flock of sea-birds darken into specks;
Then whiten, as they wheel with sunlit wings,
Winking and wavering against the sky.

The earth for form, the sea for coloring,
And overhead, fair daughters of the two,
The clouds, whose curves were moulded on the hills,
Whose tints of pearl and foam the ocean gave.

O Sea, thou art all-beautiful, but dumb!
Thou hast no utterance articulate
For human ears; only a restless moan
Of barren tides, that loathe the living earth
As alien, striving towards the barren moon.
Thou art no longer infinite to man:
Has he not touched thy boundary-shores, and now
Laid his electric fetters round thy feet?

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Thy dumb moan saddens me; let me go back
And listen to the silence of the hills.

At last I live alone:
No human judgment-seats are here
Thrust in between man and his Maker's throne,
With praise to covet, or with frown to fear:
No small, distorted judgments bless, or blame;
Only to Him I own
The inward sense of worth, or flush of shame.

God made the man alone;
And all that first grand morning walked he so.
Then was he strong and wise, till at the noon,
When tired with joyous wonder he lay prone
For rest and sleep, God let him know
The subtile sweetness that is bound in Two.

Man rises best alone:
Upward his thoughts stream, like the leaping flame,
Whose base is tempest-blown;
Upward and skyward, since from thence they came,
And thither they must flow.

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But when in twos we go,
The lightnings of the brain weave to and fro,
Level across the abyss that parts us all;
If upward, only slantwise, as we scale
Slowly together that night-shrouded wall
Which bounds our reason, lest our reason fail.
If linked in threes, and fives,
However heavenward the spirit strives,
The lowest stature draws the highest down,—
The king must keep the level of the clown.
The grosser matter has the greater power
In all attraction; every hour
We slide and slip to lower scales,
Till weary aspiration fails,
And that keen fire which might have pierced the skies
Is quenched and killed in one another's eyes.

A child had blown a bubble fair
That floated in the sunny air:
A hundred rainbows danced and swung
Upon its surface, as it hung
In films of changing color rolled,

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Crimson, and amethyst, and gold,
With faintest streaks of azure sheen,
And curdling rivulets of green.
"If so the surface shines," cried he,
"What marvel must the centre be!"
He caught it — on his empty hands
A drop of turbid water stands!

With men, to help the moments fly,
I tossed the ball of talk on high,
With glancing jest, and random stings,
Grazing the crests of thoughts and things,
In many a shifting ray of speech
That shot swift sparkles, each to each.
I thought, "Ah, could we pierce below
To inner soul, what depths would show!"
In friendships many, loves a few,
I pierced the inner depths, and knew
'T was but the shell that splendor caught:
Within, one sour and selfish thought.

I found a grotto, hidden in the gorge,
Paved by the brook in rare mosaic work
Of sand, and lucent depths, and shadow-streaks

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Veining the amber of the sun-dyed wave.
Between two mossy masses of gray rock
Lay a clear basin, which, with sun and shade
Bewitched, a great transparent opal made,
Over whose broken rims the water ran.
Above each rocky side leaned waving trees
Whose lace of branches wove a restless roof,
Trailed over by green vines that sifted down
A dust of sunshine through the chilly shade.

Leaning against a trunk of oak, rock-wedged,
Whose writhen roots were clenched upon the stones,
I was a Greek, and caught the sudden flash
Of a scared Dryad's vanishing robe, and heard
The laughter, half-suppressed, of hiding Fauns.
Up the dark stairway of the tumbling stream
The sun shot through, and struck each foamy fall
Into a silvery veil of dazzling fire.
Along its shady course, the tossing drops
By some swift sunbeam ever caught, were lit
To sparkling stars, that fell, and flashed, and fell,
Incessantly rekindled. Bubble-troops
Came dancing by, to break just at my feet;
Lo! every bubble mirrored the whole scene —

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The streak of blue between the roofing-boughs,
And on it my own face in miniature
Quaintly distorted, as if some small elf
Peered up at me beneath his glassy dome.

If men but knew the mazes of the brain
And all its crowded pictures, they would need
No Louvre or Vatican: behind our brows
Intricate galleries are built, whose walls
Are rich with all the splendors of a life.
Each crimson leaf of every autumn walk,
Dewdrops of childhood's mornings, every scene
From any window where we 've chanced to stand,
Forgotten sunsets, summer afternoons,
Hang fresh in those immortal galleries.
Few ever can unlock them, till great Death
Unrolls our lifelong memory as a scroll.
One key is solitude, and silence one,
And one a quiet mind, content to rest
In God's sufficiency, and take His world,
Not dabbling all the Master's work to death
With our small interference. God is God.

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Yet we must give the children leave to use
Our garden-tools, though they spoil tool and plant
In learning. So the Master may not scorn
Our awkwardness, as with these bungling hands
We try to uproot the ill, and plant with good
Life's barren soil: the child is learning use.
Perhaps the angels even are forbid
To laugh at us, or may not care to laugh,
With kind eyes pitying our little hurts.

'T is ludicrous that man should think he roams
Freely at will a world planned for his use.
Lo, what a mite he is! Snatched hither and yon,
Tossed round the sun, and in its orbit flashed
Round other centres, orbits without end;
His bit of brain too small to even feel
The spinning of the little hailstone, Earth.
So his creeds glibly prate of choice and will,
When his whole fate is an invisible speck
Whirled through the orbits of Eternity.

We think that we believe
That human souls shall live, and live,

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When trees have rotted into mould,
And all the rocks which these long hills enfold
Have crumbled, and beneath new oceans lie.
But why — ah, why —
If puny man is not indeed to die,
Watch I with such disdain
That human speck creeping along the plain,
And turn with such a careless scorn of men
Back to the mountain's brow again,
And feel more pleased that some small, fluttering thing
Trusts me and hovers near on fearless wing,
Than if the proudest man in all the land
Had offered me in friendliness his hand?

However small the present creature man,—
Ridiculous imitation of the gods,
Weak plagiarism on some completer world,—
Yet we can boast of that strong race to be.
The savage broke the attraction which binds fast
The fibres of the oak, and we to-day
By cunning chemistry can force apart
The elements of the air. That coming race

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Shall loose the bands by which the earth attracts;
A drop of occult tincture, a spring touched
Shall outwit gravitation; men shall float,
Or lift the hills and set them where they will.
The savage crossed the lake, and we the sea.
That coming race shall have no bounds or bars,
But, like the fledgeling eaglet, leave the nest,—
Our earthly eyrie up among the stars,—
And freely soar, to tread the desolate moon,
Or mingle with the neighbor folk of Mars.
Yea, if the savage learned by sign and sound
To bridge the chasm to his fellow's brain,
Till now we flash our whispers round the globe,
That race shall signal over the abyss
To those bright souls who throng the outer courts
Of life, impatient who shall greet men first
And solve the riddles that we die to know.

'T is night: I sit alone among the hills.
There is no sound, except the sleepless brook,
Whose voice comes faintly from the depths below
Through the thick darkness, or the sombre pines
That slumber, murmuring sometimes in their dreams.

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Hark! on a fitful gust there came the sound
Of the tide rising yonder on the bay.
It dies again: 't was like the rustling noise
Of a great army mustering secretly.
There rose an owl's cry, from the woods below,
Like a lost spirit's. — Now all 's still again. —
'T is almost fearful to sit here alone
And feel the deathly silence and the dark.
I will arise and shout, and hear at least
My own voice answer. — Not an echo even!
I wish I had not uttered that wild cry;
It broke with such a shock upon the air,
Whose leaden silence closed up after it,
And seemed to clap together at my ears.
The black depths of these muffled woods are thronged
With shapes that wait some signal to swoop out,
And swirl around and madden me with fear.
I will go climb that bare and rocky height
Into the clearer air.

So, here I breathe;
That silent darkness smothered me.
Away
Across the bay, the city with its lights

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Twinkling against the horizon's dusky line,
Looks a sea-dragon, crawled up on the shore,
With rings of fire across his rounded back,
And luminous claws spread out among the hills.
Above, the glittering heavens.—Magnificent!
Oh, if a man could be but as a star,
Having his place appointed, here to rise,
And there to set, unchanged by earthly change,
Content if it can guide some wandering bark,
Or be a beacon to some homesick soul!

Those city-lights again: they draw my gaze
As if some secret human sympathy
Still held my heart down from the lonely heaven.
A new-born constellation, settling there
Below the Sickle's ruby-hilted curve,
They gleam —— Not so! No constellation they;
I mock the sad, strong stars that never fail
In their eternal patience; from below
Comes that pale glare, like the faint, sulphurous flame
Which plays above the ashes of a fire:
So trembles the dull flicker of those lamps
Over the burnt-out energies of man.

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II

A month since I last laid my pencil down,—
An April, fairer than the Atlantic June,
Whose calendar of perfect days was kept
By daily blossoming of some new flower.
The fields, whose carpets now were silken white,
Next week were orange-velvet, next, sea-blue.
It was as if some central fire of bloom,
From which in other climes a random root
Is now and then shot up, here had burst forth
And overflowed the fields, and set the land
Aflame with flowers. I watched them day by day,
How at the dawn they wake, and open wide
Their little petal-windows, how they turn
Their slender necks to follow round the sun,
And how the passion they express all day
In burning color, steals forth with the dew
All night in odor.

I have wandered much
These weeks, but everywhere a restless mind
Has dogged me like the shadow at my heels.

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Sometimes I watched the morning mist arise,
Like an imprisoned Genie from the stream,
And wished that death would come on me like dawn,
Drawing the spirit, that white, vaporous mist,
Up from this noisy, fretted stream of life,
To fall where God will, in his bounteous showers.
Sometimes I walked at sunset on the edge
Of the steep gorge, and saw my shadow pace
Along a shadow-wall across the abyss,
And felt that we, with all our phantom deeds,
Are but far-slanted shadows of some life
That walks between our planet and its God.
All the long nights — those memory-haunted nights,
When sleepless conscience would not let me sleep,
But stung, and stung, and pointed to the world
Which like a coward I had left behind,
I watched the heavens, where week by week the moon
Slow swelled its silver bud, blossomed full gold,
And slowly faded.

Laid the pencil down —
Why not? Are there not books enough? Is man
A sick child that must be amused by songs,
Or be made sicker with their foolish noise?

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Then illness came: I should have argued, once,
That the ill body gave me those ill thoughts;
But I have learned that spirit, though it be
Subtile, and hard to trace, is mightier
Than matter, and I know the poisoned mind
Poisoned its shell. Three days of fever-fire
Burned out my strength, leaving me scarcely power
To reach the brook's side and my scanty food.
What would I not have given to hear the voice
Of some one who would raise my throbbing head
And shade the fevering sun, and cool my hand
In her moist palms! But I lay there, alone.
Blessed be sickness, which cuts down our pride
And bares our helplessness. I have had new thoughts.
I think the fever burned away some lies
Which clogged the truthful currents of the brain.
Am I quite happy here? Have I the right,
As wholly independent, to scorn men?
What do I owe them — self? Should I be I,
Born in these hills? A savage rather! Food,
The sailor-bread? Yes, that took mill and men:
Yet flesh and fowl are free; but powder and gun —
What human lives went to the making of them?
I am dependent as the villager

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Who lives by the white wagon's daily round.
Yea, better feed upon the ox, to which
The knife is mercy after slavery,
Than kill the innocent birds, and trustful deer
Whose big blue eyes have almost human pain;
That 's murder!
I scorned books: to those same books
I owe the power to scorn them.
I despised
Men: from themselves I drew the pure ideal
By which to measure them.
At woman's love
I laughed: but to that love I owe
The hunger for a more abiding love.
Their nestlings in our hearts leave vacant there
These hollow places, like a lark's round nest
Left empty in the grass, and filled with flowers.

What do I here alone? 'T was not so strange,
Weary of discords, that I chose to hear
The one, clear, perfect note of solitude;
But now it plagues the ear, that one shrill note:
Give me the chords back, even though some ring false.

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Unmarried to the steel, the flint is cold:
Strike one to the other, and they wake in fire.

A solitary fagot will not burn:
Bring two, and cheerily the flame ascends.
Alone, man is a lifeless stone; or lies
A charring ember, smouldering into ash.

If the man riding yonder looks a speck,
The town an ant-hill, that is but the trick
Of our perspective: wisdom merely means
Correction of the angles at the eye.
I hold my hand up, so, before my face, —
It blots ten miles of country, and a town.
This little lying lens, that twists the rays,
So cheats the brain that My house, My affairs,
My hunger, or My happiness, My ache,
And My religion, fill immensity!
Yours merely dot the landscape casually.
'T is well God does not measure a man's worth
By the image on his neighbor's retina.

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I am alone: the birds care not for me,
Except to sing a little farther off,
With looks that say, "What does this fellow here?"
The loud brook babbles only for the flowers:
The mountain and the forest take me not
Into their meditations; I disturb
Their silence, as a child that drags his toy
Across a chapel's porch. The viewless ones
Who flattered me to claim their company
By gleams of thought they tossed to me for alms,
About their grander matters turn, nor deign
To notice me, unless it were to say —
As we put off a troublesome child — "There, go!
Men are your fellows, go and mate with them!"

If I could find one soul that would not lie,
I would go back, and we would arm our hands,
And strike at every ugly weed that stands
In God's wide garden of the world, and try,
Obedient to the Gardener's commands,
To set some smallest flowers before we die.

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One such I had found, —
But she was bound,
Fettered and led, bid for and sold,
Chained to a stone by a ring of gold.

In a stony sense the stone loved her, too:
Between our places the river was broad,
Should she tread on a broken heart to go through —
Could she put a man's life in mid-stream to be trod,
To come over dry-shod?

Shame! that a man with hand and brain
Should, like a love-lorn girl, complain,
Rhyming his dainty woes anew,
When there is honest work to do!

What work, what work? Is God not wise
To rule the world He could devise?
Yet see thou, though the realm be His,
He governs it by deputies.
Enough to know of Chance and Luck,
The stroke we choose to strike is struck;
The deed we slight will slighted be,

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In spite of all Necessity.
The Parcæ's web of good and ill
They weave with human shuttle still,
And fate is fate through man's free will.

With sullen thoughts that smoulder hour by hour,
In vague expectancy of help or hope
Which still eludes my brain, waiting I sit
Like a blind beggar at a palace-gate,
Who hears the rustling past of silks, and airs
Of costly odor mock him blowing by,
And feels within a dull and aching wish
That the proud wall would let some coping down
To crush him dead, and let him have his rest.

No help from men: they could not, if they would.
And God? He lets His world be wrung with pain.
No help at all then? Let life be in vain:
To get no help is surely greatest gain;
To taunt the hunger down is sweetest food.

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O mocker, Memory! From what floating cloud,
Or from what witchery of the haunted wood,
Or faintest perfumes, softly drifting through
The lupines' lattice-bars of white and blue,
Steals back upon my soul this weakest mood?
My heart is dreaming; — in a shadowy room
I breathe the vague scent of a jasmin-bloom
That floats on waves of music, softer played,
Till song and odor all the brain pervade;
Swiftly across my cheek there sweeps the thrill
Of burning lips, — then all is hushed and still;
And round the vision in unearthly awe
Deeps of enchanted starlight seem to draw,
In which my soul sinks, falling noiselessly —
As from a lone ship, far-off, in the night,
Out of a child's hand slips a pebble white,
Glimmering and fading down the awful sea.

That night, which pushed me out of Paradise,
When the last guest had taken his mask of smiles
And gone, she wheeled a sofa from the light
Where I sat touching the piano-keys,
And begged me play her weariness away.

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I played all sweet and solemn airs I knew,
And when, with music mesmerized, she slept,
I made the deep chords tell her dreams my love.
Once, when they grew too passionate, I saw
The faint blush ripen in their glow, and chide,
Even in dreams, the rash, tumultuous thought.
Then when I made them say, "Sleep on, dream on,
For now we are together; when thou wak'st
Forevermore we are alone — alone,"
She sighed in sleep, and waked not: then I rose,
And softly stooped my head, and, half in awe,
Half passion-rapt, I kissed her lips farewell.
—— Only the meek-mouthed blossoms kiss I now,
Or the cold cheek that sometimes comes at night
In haunted dreams, and brushes past my own.

Ah, what hast thou to do with me, sweet song —
  Why hauntest thou and vexest so my dreams?
Have I not turned away from thee so long —
  So long, and yet the starry midnight seems
Astir with tremulous music, as of old,—
Forbidden memories opening, fold on fold?

O ghost of Love, why, with thy rose-leaf lips,
  Dost thou still mock my sleep with kisses warm,

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Torturing my dreams with touching finger tips,
That madden me to clasp thy phantom form?
Have I not earned, by all these tears, at last,
The right to rest untroubled by that Past?

Unto thy patient heart, my mother Earth,
I come, a weary child.
I have no claim, save that thou gav'st me birth,
And hast sustained me with thy nurture mild.
I have stood up alone these many years;
Now let me come and lie upon my face,
And spread my hands among the dewy grass,
Till the slow wind's mesmeric touches pass
Above my brain, and all its throbbing chase;
Into thy bosom take these bitter tears,
And let them seem unto the innocent flowers
Only as dew, or heaven's gentle showers;
Till, quieted and hushed against thy breast,
I can forget to weep,
And sink at last to sleep, —
Long sleep and rest.

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Her face!
It must have been her face,—
No other one was ever half so fair,—
No other head e'er bent with such meek grace
Beneath that weight of beautiful blonde hair.
In a carriage on the street of the town,
Where I had strayed in walking from the bay,
Just as the sun was going down,
Shielding her sight from his latest ray,
She sat, and scanned with eager eye
The faces of the passers-by.
Whom was she looking for? Not me —
Yet what wild purpose can it be
That tempted her to this wild land?
— I marked that on her lifted hand
The diamonds no longer shine
Of the ring that meant, not mine — not mine!

Ah fool — fool — fool! crawl back to thy den,
Like a wounded beast as thou art, again;
Whosever she be, not thine — not thine!

I sat last night on yonder ridge of rocks
To see the sun set over Tamalpais,

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Whose tented peak, suffused with rosy mist,
Blended the colors of the sea and sky
And made the mountain one great amethyst
Hanging against the sunset.

In the west
There lay two clouds which parted company,
Floating like two soft-breasted swans, and sailed
Farther and farther separate, till one stayed
To make a mantle for the evening-star;
The other wept itself away in rain.
A fancy seized me; — if, in other worlds,
That Spirit from afar should call to me,
Across some starry chasm impassable,
Weeping, "Oh, hadst thou only come to me! —
I loved you so! — I prayed each night that God
Would send you to me! Now, alas! too late,
Too late — farewell!" and still again, "farewell!"
Like the pulsation of a silenced bell
Whose sobs beat on within the brain.

I rose,
And smote my staff strongly against the ground,
And set my face homeward, and set my heart

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Firm in a passionate purpose: there, in haste,
With that one echo goading me to speed,
"If it should be too late — if it should be
Too late — too late!" I took a pen and wrote:

"Dear Soul, if I am mad to speak to thee,
And this faint glimmer which I call a hope
Be but the corpse-light on the grave of hope —
If thou, O darling Star, art in the West
To be my Evening-star, and watch my day
Fade slowly into desolate twilight, burn
This folly in the flames; and scattered with
Its ashes, let my madness be forgot.
But if not so, oh be my Morning-star,
And crown my East with splendor: come to me!"

A stern, wild, broken place for a man to walk
And muse on broken fortunes; a rare place,—
There in the Autumn weather, cool and still,
With the warm sunshine clinging round the rocks
Softly, in pity, like a woman's love,—
To wait for some one who can never come —
As a man there was waiting. Overhead

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A happy bird sang quietly to himself,
Unconscious of such sombre thoughts below,
To which the song was background: —

"Yet how men
Sometimes will struggle, writhe, and scream at death!
It were so easy now, in the mild air,
To close the senses, slowly sleep, and die;
To cease to be the shaped and definite cloud,
And melt away into the fathomless blue; —
Only to touch this crimson thread of life,
Whose steady ripple pulses in my wrist,
And watch the little current soak the grass,
Till the haze came, then darkness, and then rest.
Would God be angry if I stopped one life
Among His myriads — such a worthless one?
If I should pray, I wonder would He send
An angel down out of that great, white cloud,
(He surely could spare one from praising Him,)
To tell if there is any better way
Than — Look! Why, that is grand, now! (Am I
mad?
I did not think I should go mad!) That 's grand —
One of the blessed spirits come like this

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To meet a poor, lean man among the rocks,
And answer questions for him?"

There she stood,
With blonde hair blowing back, as if the breeze
Blew a light out of it, that ever played
And hovered at her shoulders. Such blue eyes
Mirrored the dreamy mountain distances,—
(Yet, are the angels' faces thin and wan
Like that; and do they have such mouths, so drawn,
As if a sad song, some sad time, had died
Upon the lips, and left its echo there?)

And the man rose, and stood with folded hands
And head bent, and his downcast looks in awe
Touching her garment's hem, that, when she spoke,
Trembled a little where it met her feet.

"I am come, because you called to me to come.
What were all other voices when I heard
The voice of my own soul's soul call to me?
You knew I loved you — oh, you must have known!
Was it a noble thing to do, you think,
To leave a lonely girl to die down there

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In the great empty world, and come up here
To make a martyr's pillar of your pride?
There has been nobler work done, there in the world,
Than you have done this year!"

Then cried the man:
"O voice that I have prayed for — O sad voice,
And woeful eyes, spare me if I have sinned!
There was a little ring you used to wear" —

"O strange, wild Fates, that balance bliss and woe
On such poor straws! It was a brother's gift."

"You never told me" —

"Did you ever ask?"

"You, too, were surely prouder then than now!"

"Dear, I am sadder now: the head must bend
A little, when one's weeping."

Then the man, —
While half his mind, bewildered, at a flash

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Took in the wide, lone place, the singing bird,
The sunshine streaming past them like a wind,
And the broad tree that moved as though it breathed:
"Oh, if 't is possible that in the world
There lies some low, mean work for me to do,
Let me go there alone: I am ashamed
To wear life's crown when I flung down its sword.
Crammed full of pride, and lust, and littleness,
O God, I am not worthy of thy gifts!
Let me find penance, till, years hence, perchance,
Made pure by toil, and scourged with pain and prayer"—

Then a voice answered through His creature's lips,—
"God asks no penance but a better life.
He purifies by pain — He only; 't is
A remedy too dangerous for our
Blind pharmacy. Lo! we have tried that way,
And borne what fruit, or blossoms even, save one
Poor passion-flower! Come, take thy happiness;
In happy hearts are all the sunbeams forged
That brighten up our weatherbeaten world.

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Come back with me — Come! for I love you —
Come!"

If it was not a dream: perchance it was —
Often it seems so, and I wonder when
I shall awaken on the mountain-side,
With a little bitter taste left in the mouth
Of too much sleep, or too much happiness,
And sigh, and wish that I might dream again.

Digitized by Google

SUNDOWN

A SEA of splendor in the West,
  Purple, and pearl, and gold,
With milk-white ships of cloud, whose sails
  Slowly the winds unfold.

Brown cirrus-bars, like ribbed beach-sand,
  Cross the blue upper dome;
And nearer flecks of feathery white
  Blow over them like foam.

But when that transient glory dies
  Into the twilight gray,
And leaves me on the beach alone
  Beside the glimmering bay;

And when I know that, late or soon,
  Love's glory finds a grave,
And hearts that danced like dancing foam
  Break like the breaking wave;

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A little dreary, homeless thought
Creeps sadly over me,
Like the shadow of a lonely cloud
Moving along the sea.

Digitized by Google

THE ARCH

JUST where the street of the village ends,
Over the road an oak-tree tall,
Curving in more than a crescent, bends
With an arch like the gate of a Moorish wall.

Over across the river there,
Looking under the arch, one sees
The sunshine slant through the distant air,
And burn on the cliff and the tufted trees.

Each day, hurrying through the town,
I stop an instant, early or late,
As I cross the street, and glancing down
I catch a glimpse through the Moorish gate.

Only a moment there I stand,
But I look through that loop in the dusty air,
Into a far-off fairy land,
Where all seems calm, and kind, and fair.

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So sometimes at the end of a thought,
Where with a vexing doubt we 've striven,
A sudden, sunny glimpse is caught
Of an open arch, and a peaceful heaven.

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APRIL IN OAKLAND

Was there last night a snowstorm?
So thick the orchards stand,
With drift on drift of blossom-flakes
Whitening all the land.

Or have the waves of life that swelled
The green buds, day by day,
Broken at once in clinging foam
And scattered odor-spray?

The winds come drowsy with the breath
Of cherry and of pear,
Sighing their perfume-laden wings
No more of sweet can bear.

Over the garden-gateway
That parts the tufted hedge,
Rimming the idly twinkling bay
Sleeps the blue mountains' edge.

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Yon fleece of clouds in heaven,
  So delicate and fair,
Seems a whole league of orchard-bloom
  Sailing along the air.

Oh, loveliness of nature!
  Oh, sordid minds of men!
Without, a world of bloom and balm —
  A sour, sad soul within.

O winds that sweep the orchard
  With Orient spices sweet,
Why bring ye with that desolate sound
  The dead leaves to my feet?

Ah, sweeter were the fragrance
  That I to-day have found,
If last year's crumbled leaves of love
  Were buried under ground;

And fairer were the shadowed troops
  That fleck the distant hill,
If shades of clouds that will not pass
  Dimmed not my memory still.

Digitized by Google

Better than all the beauty
  Which cloud or blossom shows
Is the blue sky that arches all
  With measureless repose.

And better than the bright blue sky,
  To know that far away
Sweep all the silent host of stars
  Behind the veil of day.

And best to feel that there and here,
  About us and above,
Move on the purposes of God
  In justice and in love.

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STARLIGHT

They think me daft, who nightly meet
My face turned starward, while my feet
Stumble along the unseen street;

But should man's thoughts have only room
For Earth, his cradle and his tomb,
Not for his Temple's grander gloom?

And must the prisoner all his days
Learn but his dungeon's narrow ways
And never through its grating gaze?

Then let me linger in your sight,
My only amaranths! blossoming bright
As over Eden's cloudless night.

The same vast belt, and square, and crown,
That on the Deluge glittered down,
And lit the roofs of Bethlehem town!

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Ye make me one with all my race,
A victor over time and space,
Till all the path of men I pace.

Far-speeding backward in my brain
We build the Pyramids again,
And Babel rises from the plain;

And climbing upward on your beams
I peer within the Patriarchs' dreams,
Till the deep sky with angels teems.

My Comforters! — Yea, why not mine?
The power that kindled you doth shine,
In man, a mastery divine;

That Love which throbs in every star,
And quickens all the worlds afar,
Beats warmer where his children are.

The shadow of the wings of Death
Broods over us; we feel his breath:
"Resurgam" still the spirit saith.

Digitized by Google

These tired feet, this weary brain,
Blotted with many a mortal stain,
May crumble earthward — not in vain.

With swifter feet that shall not tire,
Eyes that shall fail not at your fire,
Nearer your splendors I aspire.

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A DEAD BIRD IN WINTER

The cold, hard sky and hidden sun,
  The stiffened trees that shiver so,
With bare twigs naked every one
  To these harsh winds that freeze the snow,—

It was a bitter place to die,
  Poor birdie! Was it easier, then,
On such a world to shut thine eye,
  And sleep away from life, than when

The apple-blossoms tint the air,
  And, twittering in the sunny trees,
Thy fellow-songsters flit and pair,
  Breasting the warm, caressing breeze?

Nay, it were easiest, I feel,
  Though 't were a brighter Earth to lose,
To let the summer shadows steal
  About thee, bringing their repose;

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When the noon hush was on the air,
And on the flowers the warm sun shined,
And Earth seemed all so sweet and fair,
That He who made it must be kind.

So I, too, could not bear to go
From Life in this unfriendly clime,
To lie beneath the crusted snow,
When the dead grass stands stiff with rime;

But under those blue skies of home,
Far easier were it to lie down
Where the perpetual violets bloom
And the rich moss grows never brown;

Where linnets never cease to build
Their nests, in boughs that always wave
To odorous airs, with blessing filled
From nestled blossoms round my grave.

Digitized by Google

SPRING TWILIGHT

Singing in the rain, robin?
  Rippling out so fast
All thy flute-like notes, as if
  This singing were thy last!

After sundown, too, robin?
  Though the fields are dim,
And the trees grow dark and still,
  Dripping from leaf and limb.

'T is heart-broken music —
  That sweet, faltering strain, —
Like a mingled memory,
  Half ecstasy, half pain.

Surely thus to sing, robin,
  Thou must have in sight
Beautiful skies behind the shower,
  And dawn beyond the night.

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Would thy faith were mine, robin!
Then, though night were long,
All its silent hours should melt
Their sorrow into song.

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EVENING

THE Sun is gone: those glorious chariot-wheels
Have sunk their broadening spokes of flame, and left
Thin rosy films wimpled across the West,
Whose last faint tints melt slowly in the blue,
As the last trembling cadence of a song
Fades into silence sweeter than all sound.

Now the first stars begin to tremble forth
Like the first instruments of an orchestra
Touched softly, one by one. — There in the East
Kindles the glory of moonrise: how its waves
Break in a surf of silver on the clouds! —
White, motionless clouds, like soft and snowy wings
Which the great Earth spreads, sailing round the Sun.

O silent stars! that over ages past
Have shone serenely as ye shine to-night,
Unseal, unseal the secret that ye keep!
Is it not time to tell us why we live?

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Through all these shadowy corridors of years,
(Like some gray Priest, who through the Mysteries
Led the blindfolded Neophyte in fear,)
Time leads us blindly onward, till in wrath
Tired Life would seize and throttle its stern guide,
And force him tell us *whither* and *how long*.
But Time gives back no answer — only points
With motionless finger to eternity,
Which deepens over us, as that deep sky
Darkens above me: only its vestibule
Glimmers with scattered stars; and down the West
A silent meteor slowly slides afar,
As though, pacing the garden-walks of heaven,
Some musing seraph had let fall a flower.

Digitized by Google

THE ORGAN

It is no harmony of human making,
  Though men have built those pipes of burnished gold;
Their music, out of Nature's heart awaking,
  Forever new, forever is of old.

Man makes not — only finds — all earthly beauty,
  Catching a thread of sunshine here and there,
Some shining pebble in the path of duty,
  Some echo of the songs that flood the air.

That prelude is a wind among the willows,
  Rising until it meets the torrent's roar;
Now a wild ocean, beating his great billows
  Among the hollow caverns of the shore.

It is the voice of some vast people, pleading
  For justice from an ancient shame and wrong, —
The tramp of God's avenging armies, treading
  With shouted thunders of triumphant song.

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O soul, that sittest chanting dreary dirges,
Couldest thou but rise on some divine desire,
As those deep chords upon their swelling surges
Bear up the wavering voices of the choir!

But ever lurking in the heart, there lingers
The trouble of a false and jarring tone,
As some great Organ which unskillful fingers
Vex into discords when the Master 's gone.

Digitized by Google

EASTERN WINTER

COLD — cold — the very sun looks cold,
With those thin rays of chilly gold
Laid on that gap of bluish sky
That glazes like a dying eye.

The naked trees are shivering,
Each cramped and bare branch quivering,
Cutting the bleak wind into blades,
Whose edge to brain and bone invades.

That hard ground seems to ache, all day,
Even for a sheet of snow, to lay
Upon its icy feet and knees,
Stretched stiffly there to freeze and freeze.

And yon shrunk mortal — what 's within
That nipped and winter-shriveled skin?
The pinched face drawn in peevish lines,
The voice that through his blue lips whines, —

Digitized by Google

The frost has got within, you see,—
Left but a selfish *me* and *me:*
The heart is chilled, its nerves are numb,
And love has long been frozen dumb.

Ah, give me back the clime I know,
Where all the year geraniums blow,
And hyacinth-buds bloom white for snow;

Where hearts beat warm with life's delight,
Through radiant winter's sunshine bright,
And summer's starry deeps of night;

Where man may let earth's beauty thaw
The wintry creed which Calvin saw,
That God is only Power and Law;

And out of Nature's Bible prove,
That here below as there above
Our Maker — Father — God — is Love.

Digitized by Google

SLEEPING

HUSHED within her quiet bed
She is lying all the night,
In her pallid robes of white,
Eyelids on the pure eyes pressed,
Soft hands folded on the breast, —
And you thought I meant it — dead?

Nay! I smile at your shocked face:
In the morning she will wake,
Turn her dreams to sport, and make
All the household glad and gay,
Yet for many a merry day,
With her beauty and her grace.

But some summer 't will be said, —
"She is lying all the night,
In her pallid robes of white,
Eyelids on the tired eyes pressed,
Hands that cross upon the breast:"
We shall understand it — dead!

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Yet 't will only be a sleep:
When, with songs and dewy light,
Morning blossoms out of Night,
She will open her blue eyes
'Neath the palms of Paradise,
While we foolish ones shall weep.

Digitized by Google

A PRAYER

O God, our Father, if we had but truth!
  Lost truth — which thou perchance
Didst let man lose, lest all his wayward youth
  He waste in song and dance;
That he might gain, in searching, mightier powers
For manlier use in those foreshadowed hours.

If, blindly groping, he shall oft mistake,
  And follow twinkling motes
Thinking them stars, and the one voice forsake
  Of Wisdom for the notes
Which mocking Beauty utters here and there,
Thou surely wilt forgive him, and forbear!

Oh, love us, for we love thee, Maker — God!
  And would creep near thy hand,
And call thee "Father, Father," from the sod
  Where by our graves we stand,
And pray to touch, fearless of scorn or blame,
Thy garment's hem, which Truth and Good we name.

Digitized by Google

THE POLAR SEA

At the North, far away,
Rolls a great sea for aye,
Silently, awfully.
Round it on every hand
Ice-towers majestic stand,
Guarding this silent sea
Grimly, invincibly.
Never there man hath been,
Who hath come back again,
Telling to ears of men
What is this sea within.
Under the starlight,
Rippling the moonlight,
Drinking the sunlight,
Desolate, never heard nor seen,
Beating forever it hath been.

From our life far away
Roll the dark waves, for aye,
Of an Eternity,

Digitized by Google

Silently, awfully.
Round it on every hand
Death's icy barriers stand,
Guarding this silent sea
Grimly, invincibly.
Never there man hath been
Who could return again,
Telling to mortal ken
What is within the sea
Of that Eternity.

Terrible is our life—
In its whole blood-written history
Only a feverish strife;
In its beginning, a mystery—
In its wild ending, an agony.
Terrible is our death—
Black-hanging cloud over Life's setting sun,
Darkness of night when the daylight is done.
In the shadow of that cloud,
Deep within that darkness' shroud,
Rolls the ever-throbbing sea;
And we—all we—

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Are drifting rapidly
And floating silently
Into that unknown sea—
Into Eternity.

Digitized by Google

THE FUTURE

WHAT may we take into the vast forever?
That marble door
Admits no fruit of all our long endeavor,
No fame-wreathed crown we wore,
No garnered lore.

What can we bear beyond the unknown portal?
No gold, no gains
Of all our toiling: in the life immortal
No hoarded wealth remains,
Nor gilds, nor stains.

Naked from out that far abyss behind us
We entered here:
No word came with our coming, to remind us
What wondrous world was near,
No hope, no fear.

Into the silent, starless Night before us,
Naked we glide:

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No hand has mapped the constellations o'er us,
No comrade at our side,
No chart, no guide.

Yet fearless toward that midnight, black and hollow,
Our footsteps fare:
The beckoning of a Father's hand we follow —
His love alone is there,
No curse, no care.

Digitized by Google

A DAILY MIRACLE

JUNE'S sunshine on the broad porch shines
Through tangled curtains of crossing vines;
The restless dancing of the leaves
Dusky webs of shadow weaves,
That wander on the oaken floor,
Or cross the threshold of the door.
Scattered where'er their mazes run
Lie little phantoms of the sun:
Whatever chink the sunbeam found,
Crooked or narrow, on the ground
The shadowy image still is round.
So the image of God in the heart of a man,
Which truth makes, rifting as it can
Through the narrow crooked ways
Of our restless deeds and days,
Still is His image — bright or dim —
And scorning it is scorning Him.

Digitized by Google

THE NORTH WIND

All night, beneath the flashing hosts of stars,
The North poured forth the passion of its soul
In mighty longings for the tawny South,
Sleeping afar among her orange-blooms.
All night, through the deep cañon's organ-pipes,
Swept down the grand orchestral harmonies
Tumultuous, till the hills' rock buttresses
Trembled in unison.

The sun has risen,
But still the storming sea of air beats on,
And o'er the broad green slopes a flood of light
Comes streaming through the heavens like a wind,
Till every leaf and twig becomes a lyre
And thrills with vibrant splendor.

Down the bay
The furrowed blue, save that 't is starred with foam,
Is bare and empty as the sky of clouds;
For all the little sails, that yesterday

Digitized by Google

Flocked past the islands, now have furled their wings,
And huddled frightened at the wharves — just as,
A moment since, a flock of twittering birds
Whirled through the almond-trees like scattered
leaves,
And hid beyond the hedge.

How the old oaks
Stand stiffly to it, and wrestle with the storm!
While the tall eucalyptus' plumy tops
Tumble and toss and stream with quivering light.
Hark! when it lulls a moment at the ear,
The fir-trees sing their sea-song: — now again
The roar is all about us like a flood;
And like a flood the fierce light shines, and burns
Away all distance, till the far blue ridge,
That rims the ocean, rises close at hand,
And high, Prometheus-like, great Tamalpais
Lifts proudly his grand front, and bears his scar,
Heaven's scath of wrath, defiant like a god.

I thank thee, glorious wind! Thou bringest me
Something that breathes of mountain crags and
pines,

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Yea, more — from the unsullied, farthest North,
Where crashing icebergs jar like thunder-shocks,
And midnight splendors wave and fade and flame,
Thou bring'st a keen, fierce joy. So wilt thou help
The soul to rise in strength, as some great wave
Leaps forth, and shouts, and lifts the ocean-foam,
And rides exultant round the shining world.

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CALIFORNIA WINTER

THIS is not winter: where is the crisp air,
And snow upon the roof, and frozen ponds,
And the star-fire that tips the icicle?

Here blooms the late rose, pale and odorless;
And the vague fragrance in the garden walks
Is but a doubtful dream of mignonette.
In some smooth spot, under a sleeping oak
That has not dreamed of such a thing as spring,
The ground has stolen a kiss from the cool sun
And thrilled a little, and the tender grass
Has sprung untimely, for these great bright days,
Staring upon it, will not let it live.
The sky is blue, and 't is a goodly time,
And the round, barren hillsides tempt the feet;
But 't is not winter: such as seems to man
What June is to the roses, sending floods
Of life and color through the tingling veins.

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It is a land without a fireside. Far
Is the old home, where, even this very night,
Roars the great chimney with its glorious fire,
And old friends look into each other's eyes
Quietly, for each knows the other's trust.

Heaven is not far away such winter nights:
The big white stars are sparkling in the east,
And glitter in the gaze of solemn eyes;
For many things have faded with the flowers,
And many things their resurrection wait;
Earth like a sepulchre is sealed with frost,
And Morn and Even beside the silent door
Sit watching, and their soft and folded wings
Are white with feathery snow.

Yet even here
We are not quite forgotten by the Hours,
Could human eyes but see the beautiful
Save through the glamour of a memory.
Soon comes the strong south wind, and shouts aloud
Its jubilant anthem. Soon the singing rain
Comes from warm seas, and in its skyey tent
Enwraps the drowsy world. And when, some night,

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Its flowing folds invisibly withdraw,
Lo! the new life in all created things.
The azure mountains and the ocean gates
Against the lovely sky stand clean and clear
As a new purpose in the wiser soul.

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INFLUENCES

From the scarlet sea of sunset,
  Tossing up its waves of fire
To a floating spray of splendor,
  Kindles through me mad desire
    Now — now — now to call her mine!

From the ashen gray of twilight
  Musings dark as shadows linger —
Slowly creeping, leave me weeping —
  While in silence round my finger
    That long glossy lock I twine.

From the holy hush of starlight
  Sinks a peace upon my spirit,
And a voice of hope and patience —
  All the quiet night I hear it —
    Whispers, "Wait, for she is thine!"

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THE LOVER'S SONG

Lend me thy fillet, Love!
I would no longer see;
Cover mine eyelids close awhile,
And make me blind like thee.

Then might I pass her sunny face,
And know not it was fair;
Then might I hear her voice, nor guess
Her starry eyes were there.

Ah! banished so from stars and sun—
Why need it be my fate?
If only she might deem me good
And wise, and be my mate!

Lend her thy fillet, Love!
Let her no longer see:
If there is hope for me at all,
She must be blind like thee.

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A TROPICAL MORNING AT SEA

Sky in its lucent splendor lifted
  Higher than cloud can be;
Air with no breath of earth to stain it,
  Pure on the perfect sea.

Crests that touch and tilt each other,
  Jostling as they comb;
Delicate crash of tinkling water,
  Broken in pearling foam.

Plashings — or is it the pinewood's whispers,
  Babble of brooks unseen,
Laughter of winds when they find the blossoms,
  Brushing aside the green?

Waves that dip, and dash, and sparkle;
  Foam-wreaths slipping by,
Soft as a snow of broken roses
  Afloat over mirrored sky.

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Off to the East the steady sun-track
  Golden meshes fill —
Webs of fire, that lace and tangle,
  Never a moment still.

Liquid palms but clap together,
  Fountains, flower-like, grow —
Limpid bells on stems of silver —
  Out of a slope of snow.

Sea-depths, blue as the blue of violets —
  Blue as a summer sky,
When you blink at its arch sprung over
  Where in the grass you lie.

Dimly an orange bit of rainbow
  Burns where the low west clears,
Broken in air, like a passionate promise
  Born of a moment's tears.

Thinned to amber, rimmed with silver,
  Clouds in the distance dwell,
Clouds that are cool, for all their color,
  Pure as a rose-lipped shell.

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Fleets of wool in the upper heavens
  Gossamer wings unfurl;
Sailing so high they seem but sleeping
  Over yon bar of pearl.

What would the great world lose, I wonder—
  Would it be missed or no—
If we stayed in the opal morning,
  Floating forever so?

Swung to sleep by the swaying water,
  Only to dream all day—
Blow, salt wind from the north upstarting,
  Scatter such dreams away!

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A FOOLISH WISH

WHY need I seek some burden small to bear
Before I go?
Will not a host of nobler souls be here,
Heaven's will to do?
Of stronger hands, unfailing, unafraid?
O silly soul! what matters my small aid
Before I go!

I tried to find, that I might show to them,
Before I go,
The path of purer lives: the light was dim,—
I do not know
If I had found some footprints of the way;
It is too late their wandering feet to stay,
Before I go.

I would have sung the rest some song of cheer,
Before I go;
But still the chords rang false; some jar of fear,
Some jangling woe.

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And at the end I cannot weave one chord
To float into their hearts my last warm word,
Before I go.

I would be satisfied if I might tell,
Before I go,
That one warm word, — how I have loved them well,
Could they but know!
And would have gained for them some gleam of good;
Have sought it long; still seek, — if but I could!
Before I go.

'T is a child's longing, on the beach at play:
"Before I go,"
He begs the beckoning mother, "Let me stay
One shell to throw!"
'T is coming night; the great sea climbs the shore, —
"Ah, let me toss one little pebble more,
Before I go!"

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EVERY-DAY LIFE

THE marble-smith, at his morning task
Merrily glasses the blue-veined stone,
With stout hands circling smooth. You ask,
"What will it be, when it is done?"

"A shaft for a young girl's grave." Both hands
Go back with a will to their sinewy play;
And he sings like a bird, as he swaying stands,
A rollicking stave of Love and May.

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BEFORE SUNRISE IN WINTER

A PURPLE cloud hangs half way down;
Sky, yellow gold below;
The naked trees, beyond the town,
Like masts against it show —

Bare masts and spars of our earth-ship,
With shining snow-sails furled;
And through the sea of space we slip,
That flows all round the world.

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THE CHOICE

ONLY so much of power each day —
So much nerve-force brought in play;
If it goes for politics or trade,
Ends gained or money made,
You have it not for the soul and God —
The choice is yours, to soar or plod.
So much water in the rill:
It may go to turn the miller's wheel,
  Or sink in the desert, or flow on free
To brighten its banks in meadows green,
Till broadening out, fair fields between,
  It streams to the moon-enchanted sea.
Only so little power each day:
Week by week days slide away;
  Ere the life goes, what shall it be —
A trade — a game — a mockery,
Or the gate of a rich Eternity?

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SIBYLLINE BARTERING

Fate, the gray Sibyl, with kind eyes above
  Closely locked lips, brought youth a merry crew
Of proffered friends; the price, self-slaying love.
  Proud youth repulsed them. She and they with-
    drew.

Then she brought half the troop; the cost, the
    same.
  My man's heart wavered: should I take the few,
And pay the whole? But while I went and came,
  Fate had decided. She and they withdrew.

Once more she came, with two. Now life's midday
  Left fewer hours before me. Lonelier grew
The house and heart. But should the late purse
    pay
  The earlier price? And she and they withdrew.

At last I saw Age his forerunners send.
  Then came the Sibyl, still with kindly eyes

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And close-locked lips, and offered me one friend, —
Thee, my one darling! With what tears and cries

I claimed and claim thee; ready now to pay
The perfect love that leaves no self to slay!

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MUSIC

THE little rim of moon hangs low — the room
Is saintly with the presence of Night,
And Silence broods with knitted brows around.
The woven lilies of the velvet floor
Blend with the roses in the dusky light,
Which shows twin pictures glimmering from the walls:
Here, a mailed group kneels by the rocky sea —
There, a gray desert, and a well, and palms;
While the faint perfume of a violet,
Vague as a dream of Spring, pervades the air.
Where the moon gleams along the organ-front,
The crooked shadow of a dead branch stirs
Like ghostly fingers gliding through a tune.
Now rises one with faintly rustling robes,
And white hands search among the glistening keys.
Out of the silence sounds are forming — tones
That seem to come from infinite distances, —
Soft trebles fluttering down like snowy doves
Just dipping their swift wings in the deep bass

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That crumbles downward like a crumbling wave;
And out of those low-gathering harmonies
A voice arises, tangled in their maze,
Then soaring up exultantly alone,
While the accompaniment wails and complains.
— I am upon the seashore. 'T is the sound
Of ocean, surging on against the land.
That throbbing thunder is the roar of surf
Beaten and broken on the frothy rocks.
Those whispering trebles are the plashing waves
That ripple up the smooth sand's slope, and kiss
The tinkling shells with coy lips, quick withdrawn;
And over all, the solitary voice
Is the wind wandering on its endless quest.
— A change comes, in a crash of minor chords.
I am a dreamer, waking from his dream
Into the life to which our life is sleep.
My soul is floating — floating, till afar
The round Earth rolls, with fleece of moonlit cloud,
A globe of amber, gleaming as it goes.
Deep in some hollow cavern of the sky
All human life is pleading to its God.
Still the accompaniment wails and complains; —
A wild confusion of entangled chords,

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Revenge, and fear, and strong men's agony,
The shrill cry of despair, the slow, deep swell
Of Time's long effort, sinking but to swell,
While woman's lonely love, and childhood's faith
Go wandering with soft whispers hand in hand.
Suddenly from the ages one pure soul
Is singled out to plead before the Throne;
And then again the solitary voice
Peals up among the stars from the great throng,
Catching from out the storm all love, all hope,
All loveliness of life, and utters it.
Then the hushed music sobs itself to sleep,
And all is still, — save the reluctant sigh
That tells the wakening from immortal dreams.

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THREE SONGS

Sing me, thou Singer, a song of gold!
Said a careworn man to me:
So I sang of the golden summer days,
And the sad, sweet autumn's yellow haze,
Till his heart grew soft, and his mellowed gaze
Was a kindly sight to see.

Sing me, dear Singer, a song of love!
A fair girl asked of me:
Then I sang of a love that clasps the Race,
Gives all, asks naught — till her kindled face
Was radiant with the starry grace
Of blessed Charity.

Sing me, O Singer, a song of life!
Cried an eager youth to me:
And I sang of the life without alloy,
Beyond our years, till the heart of the boy
Caught the golden beauty, and love, and joy
Of the great Eternity.

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DESPAIR AND HOPE

We sailed a cruise on a summer sea —
I, and a skull for company:
I in the stern our course to turn,
And it on the prow to grin at me.
Over the deep heaven, hung below,
Whose imaged clouds lay white like snow,
Glided we, as the tide might be,
Slipping swiftly, floating slow.
Past the woods all living green —
Save by the marge some fading tree,
Whose leaf, so early autumn-touched,
Would make the skull to grin at me.

Past a grove of fragrant pine,
From whose dusky depths of shade
Snowy shaft and colonnade
Marked a ruined altar-shrine; —
And the skull's grim face grinned into mine.

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Under the arch of a vine-clasped elm
  Leaning off from the mossy land,
Across the shallow the idle helm
  Lightly furrowed the silver sand:
Down the slope all clover-sweet
  Danced a group in childish glee —
Hissed a swift snake at their feet; —
  Then the skull grinned unto me.

Into a cavern dim and dank
  Crept we on the creeping tide;
Shapeless creatures rose and sank,
  Dripped with damp the ceiling wide.
Darker, chiller hung the air;
  Scarcely I the prow could see;
But I, through the shadow there,
  Felt the skull still grin at me.

Out of the cavern's thither side,
  Into a mellow, morn-like glow,
Streams the ripple-curving tide;
  Sounds of music sweeter grow;
Odorous incense, softened air,
Melodies so faint and fair,

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Thrill me through with life and love:
And all suddenly from the prow,
Where had seemed the skull just now,
Flutters to my breast a dove.

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WISDOM AND FAME

A WILDERNESS, made awful with the night —
Great glimmering trunks whose tops were hid in gloom,
Vast columns in the blackness broken off,
Between whose ghostly forms, slow-wandering,
A company of lost men sought a path.
Some groped among the dead leaves and fallen boughs
For footprints; but the rattle of the leaves
And crook of stems seemed serpents coiled to strike.
Some took the momentary sparks that rode
Upon their straining eyeballs, for far lights,
And followed them.
Some stood apart, in vain
Searching, with horror-widened eyes, for stars.
So, stumbling on, they circled round and round
Through the same mazes.
Then they singled one
To climb a pinnacled height, and see from thence

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The landmarks, and to shout from thence their course.
With aching sinews, bleeding feet, bruised hands,
He gained the height; but when they cried to him
They got but maudlin answers, — he had found,
Slaking hot thirst, a fruit that maddened him.
  Another, and another still they sent;
But every one that climbed found the ill fruit
And maddened, and gave back but wild replies:
And still in darkness they go wandering, lost.

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SERENITY

Brook,
Be still, — be still!
Midnight's arch is broken
In thy ceaseless ripples.
Dark and cold below them
Runs the troubled water, —
Only on its bosom,
Shimmering and trembling,
Doth the glinted star-shine
Sparkle and cease.

Life,
Be still, — be still!
Boundless truth is shattered
On thy hurrying current.
Rest, with face uplifted,
Calm, serenely quiet;
Drink the deathless beauty —
Thrills of love and wonder
Sinking, shining, star-like;

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Till the mirrored heaven
Hollow down within thee
Holy deeps unfathomed,
Where far thoughts go floating,
And low voices wander
Whispering peace.

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THE RUBY HEART

A CHILD'S STORY

UNDER a fragrant blossom-bell
A tiny Fairy once did dwell.
The moss was bright about her feet,
Her little face was fair and sweet,
Her form in rainbow hues was clad,
And yet the Fairy's soul was sad;
For, of the Elves that round her moved,
And in the yellow moonlight roved,
There was no Spirit that she loved.

Many a one there was, I ween,
Among the sprites that danced the green,
Whose hands were warm to clasp her own,
And voices kindly in their tone;
But love the fondest and the best
Awaked no answer in her breast:
Her heart unmoved within her slept—
And, "I can never love!" she wept.

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She taught herself a quaint old song
And crooned it over all day long:

"*He prayeth best, who loveth best*
All things both great and small;
For the dear God who loveth us,
He made and loveth all."

"But I," she said, "can never pray,
Nor to His mansions find the way,
For he will suffer not, I know,
A creature unto Him to go
Who has not loved His world below."

Slow-wandering by the brook alone,
She chose a pure white pebble-stone,
And carved it, sitting there apart,
Into a little marble heart;
She hung it by her mossy bed—
"My heart will never love," she said,
"Till this white stone turn ruby-red."

One night a moonbeam smote her face
And wakened her, and in its place

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There stood an angel, full of grace.
"Dear child," he said, "from far above
I come to teach thee how to love.
Do every day some little deed
Of kindness, some faint creature feed,
Make some hurt spirit cease to bleed,
Then carve the record fair, at night,
Upon thy heart of marble white.
Each word shall turn to ruby-red,
And so much of thy task be sped;—
For when the whole is ruddied o'er,
Thy bosom shall be cold no more;
The souls thy careless thoughts contemn
Shall win thee by *thy* deeds to *them*."

Upon the sorrowful Fairy broke
Like sudden sunshine this new hope.
Each day to some one's door she took
A kindly act, or word, or look,
Whose record, fairly carved at night,
Blushed out upon the stony white;
Till, somehow, wondrously there grew
More grace in every one she knew—
Each little ugliness concealed,

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Each goodness more and more reveal'd,—
As, when you watch the twilight through,
The sky seems one pure empty blue,
Till, o'er the paling sunset-bars,
Suddenly 't is one sweep of stars!

So day by day she found herself
Grow kindlier to each little elf;
Yea, even to the birds and bees,
And slender flowerets round her knees:
The very moss-buds at her feet
She came with warmer smile to greet,
Till now, at last, her marble heart
Was ruddy, save one little part
That gleamed all snowy as of old
In the still moonbeams, white and cold.

Her task was almost done — she knelt
And hid her glad wet eyes, and felt
Her soul's first prayer steal up to God,
Like Spring's first violet from the sod.
Through all her being softly stole
Such joy of gratitude, her soul
Brimmed over like a brimming cup —

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And then a voice said, "Child, look up!"
And lo! the stone above her head
Was a pure ruby, starry-red;
And down among the flowers there flew,
Brushing aside the moonlit dew,
A little snowy elfin dove,
And nestled on her breast, to prove
Sweet trust in one whose heart was love.

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TO CHILD ANNA

As in the Spring, ere any flowers have come,
A vague and blossomy smell
Pervades the woods, all odors mixed in one,
As if to tell
That they are mustering in each sunny dell,

So round your childish form there seems to cling
A sense of nameless grace,
A sweet confusion — budding hints of Spring
Just giving place
To graver woman-shadows in your face.

I see no longer the mere child you are —
The woman you might be
Stands in your place, with eyes that gaze afar:
Her face I see,
And it is very beautiful to me.

The little soft white hands you lay in mine
I touch with reverent care;

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I see them wrinkled into many a line,
But fair — more fair
For every weary deed they do and bear.

The fresh young mouth, all careless purity,
Has faded from my gaze,
And all the tender looks, which charity
And many patient days
Leave round the lips, seem now to take its place.

Therefore I stroke so tenderly your head,
Or watch your steps afar,
Praying that God His love on you will shed —
More faithful far
Than our blind human love and watching are.

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THE WORLD'S SECRET

I KNOW the splendor of the Sun,
  And beauty in the leaves, and moss, and grass;
I love the birds' small voices every one,
  And all the hours have kindness as they pass;

But still the heart can apprehend
  A deeper purport than the brain may know:
I see it at the dying daylight's end,
  And hear it when the winds begin to blow.

It strives to speak from all the world,
  Out of dumb earth, and moaning ocean-tides;
And brooding Night, beneath her pinions furled,
  Some message writ in starry cipher hides.

Must I go seeking everywhere
  The meanings that behind our objects be—
A depth serener in the azure air,
  A something more than peace upon the sea?

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Not one least deed one soul to bless?
  Unto the stern-eyed Future shall I bear
Only the sense of pain without redress,
  Self-sickness, and a dull and stale despair?

Nay, let me shape, in patience slow,
  My years, like the holy child his bird of clay,
Till suddenly the clod its Master know,
  And thrill with life, and soar with songs away.

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THE FOUNTAIN

Were it not horrible —
After all the dreams we dream,
Our yearnings and our prayers,
If this "I" were but a stream
Of thoughts, sensations, joys, and pains,
Which being clogged, no soul remains?
Even as the fountain seems to be
A shape of one identity,
But only is a stream of drops,
And when the swift succession stops,
The fountain melts and disappears,
Leaving no trace but scattered tears.
Yet even here, O foolish heart,
Thou wert not cheated of thy part;
Were it not better, even here,
To keep thy current pure and clear,
With pearly drops of dew to wet
The amaranth and violet,
And round thy crystal feet to shower

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Blessings and beauty every hour—
Better than in a sullen flow
To creep around the ground, and go
Wasting and sinking through the sand,
Because not always thus to stand?

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DISCONTENT

Oh that one could arise and flee
Unto blue-eyed Italy,
Far from mechanical clank and hum!
There to sit by the sighing sea,
And to dream of the days that shall be — shall be —
And the glory of years to come:
Or on some far ocean-isle,
Under the palm and the cocoa-tree,
To build of the coral boughs a home;
Or floating and falling down the Nile,
To drown one's cares in the deeps of Time
And the desert's brooding mystery.
Yet howsoever we plot or plan,
In every age — through every clime —
Still the littleness of man
Would follow us, fast as we might flee;
And the wrangling world break in on whatever is tender and sweet,
As on a beautiful tune the rattling and noise of the street.

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SEEMING AND BEING

THE brave old motto, — "Seem not — only be," —
Would it were set ablaze against the sky
In golden letters, where the world must read!
What is there done for the honest doing's sake,
In these poor times gone mad with self-parade?
There 's not a picture of the Cross but bears
The painter's name as prominent as the Christ's:
There 's not a scene, of such peculiar grace
That one would fain forget men's meanness there,
But from the rocks some rascal clothier's name
Stares in great capitals, till one could wish
The knave hung from his signboard, for a sign:
There 's not a graveyard in the land, but lo!
On the white tablets of the dead, full cut
Below their sacred names, his shameless name
Who carved the marble!

Is it not pitiful?
We are all actors, and all audience.
Yea, such a dreary farce we make our lives,

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That something is expected of a man
Upon his deathbed: "Hark ye now, good friends,
These fine last words, this notable bravery,—see!"
So even the grim cross-bones of awful Death
Must take an attitude, and the skull smirk
For a last picture.

Here is a nation, too,
(God help it!) that dare scarcely act its mind,
But walks the world's stage, quaking with the thought,
"What will great England think of me for this?"

The poet scoffs at fame, then sets himself,
Full-titled, with a portrait at the front;
Each beautiful impatient soul, who left
The world he scorned, still lingered near enough
To listen, not displeased, and hear the world
Admiringly relate how he had scorned it;
Even our great doubting Thomas, in young days
When he praised silence, did it with loud speech,
That ever too distinctly told, "'T is I,
Thomas, so noisily abuse your noise!"

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Is it not enough for the trumpet that the god
Has chosen it to sound his message through —
Must the brass blare in its own petty praise?
And can we never do the right, and do it
As though we were alone upon the earth,
And the gods blind?

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WEATHER-BOUND

Thou pitiless, false sea!
How, like a woman, thou wilt softly sigh
With heaving breast where bubble-jewels shine,
Or, beckoning, toss thy foam-white arms on high,
And laugh with those blue sunny eyes of thine!

Ah, crouching, creeping sea!
Thou tiger-cat! how, while the winds make pause
To stroke thy long smooth back in quiet play,
Thou canst unsheathe thy velvet-hidden claws
And spring all unawares upon thy prey!

Thou treacherous, cruel sea!
How thou wilt show thy glittering smile at night,
Hiding thy fangs, hushing thy fiendish cry,
And rise all gentle sport from licking white
The bones of men that underneath thee lie!

O bitter, bitter sea!
Didst thou not fawn about my naked feet,

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When I stood with thee on the beach, and say
That thou wouldst bear me swiftly home to meet
My darling, waiting there in vain to-day?

Yea, thou most mighty sea!
Keep then that promise murmured on the shore;
Put thy great shoulders to our loitering keel,
Not as in rage and wrath thou hast before —
Let the good ship thy help gigantic feel.

Thou answerest me, O sea!
Lifting in silence, o'er the waters stilled,
The shattered fragment of a rainbow fair,
A mocking promise, ne'er to be fulfilled,
Based on the waves and broken in mid-air.

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TO CHILD SARA

I LOOKED in a dew-drop's heart to-day
As it clung on a leaf of clover,
Holding a sparkle of starry light,
Like a liquid drop of opal bright
With diamond dusted over.

In that least globe of quivering dew,
The sunny scene around,
Diminished to a grass-blade's width —
Scarcely a fairy's finger-breadth —
All imaged there I found:

The spreading oak, the fir's soft fringe,
The grain-field's brightening green,
The linnet that flew fluttering by,
And, over all, the dear blue sky,
The bending boughs between:

And all the night, as from its nest
It gazes up afar,

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Its bosom holds the heavens deep,
Whose constellations o'er it sweep,
And mirrors every star.

Child, is that drop of dew — your soul —
With mirrored heaven as bright?
(Forgive me that I ask of you,
Whose heart I know is pure and true
And stainless as the light:)

The sunshine, and the starlight too, —
Fair hope, and faith as fair,
Courage, and patience, silent power,
And wisdom for each troubled hour, —
Tell me, are they all there?

Your quiet grace, and kindly words
Have influence sweet and strong;
Your hand and voice can calm the brain,
And cheer the heavy hearts of men
With music and with song:

Let the soul answer — can it give
That music clear and calm —

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The rhythmic years, the holier aim,
The scorn of pleasure, fortune, fame —
  To make our life a psalm?

All round the house, your birthday morn
  The budded orchards stand;
And we can watch from every room
The trees all blushing into bloom —
  Blossoms on every hand:

So may your Life be, many a year,
  A fair and goodly tree;
Not blossoming only, but sublime
With fruit, so hastening the time
  When Earth shall Eden be.

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A FABLE

TO CHILD ANNA

One morning, in a Prince's park,
Before the rising of the lark
Or the first glimmering twilight beam,
A Lily blossomed by a stream;
Just at the chillest, darkest hour,
When frowning clouds in heaven lower,
When shadows crouch all gaunt and grim,
And every little star is dim.
"O dreary world!" the Lily sighed:
Only the dreary wind replied.
Soon, in the East uprising slow,
A cold gray dawn began to grow.
The Lily watched where all around
The mist came creeping o'er the ground,
And listened, while with sadder tone
The morning-wind began to moan:
But all the more the light drew on,
Her tear-dewed cheek was deathlier wan,—
Each streak of daylight, as it grew,

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Revealed a world so strange and new.
Slowly the dawn crept up the sky
Like a cold, cruel, watching eye.
Once from some little wakened bird
A twittering note of joy she heard:
The chill dew fell upon her head —
She almost wished that she were dead;
"There comes no joy for me," she said.
A gnarled and wisdom-wrinkled Oak
Which overheard, in answer spoke:
"O foolish little Lilybell,
Why do you weep, when all is well?
Look up! Have faith! For by and by
The sun is coming up the sky;
All golden red the heavens will glow,
All golden green the earth below;
The birds their rippling songs will sing,
And wooing winds their spices bring:
And then the Prince will hither come
To wander 'mid his flowers, and some,
(Ah, favored blossoms!) bending down,
He plucks and places in his crown.
Look up, O foolish Lilybell!
A little while, and all is well."

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The Lily drooped and trembled still:
"The dawn," she sobbed, "is dim and chill;
And if the Prince should come, alas!
He will not stoop among the grass;
I surely cannot please his eyes,
For I am neither fair nor wise:
He 'll choose some tall and stately tree,
He surely will not care for me!"
But now the sunrise was at hand,
Lighting with splendor all the land;
As if a seraph stood below
With lifted pinions all aglow,
Whose tips of fire still nearer came
In feathery plumes of floating flame;
While from his hidden face the rays
Shot up and set the heavens ablaze.
They warmed the old Oak's wrinkled face,
And touched it with a mellow grace;
Then dancing downward to his feet
They kissed the Lily's face so sweet,
And laughed away her foolish fear
And lit a gem in every tear;
Then flew to greet the Master's eye,
Who even now was drawing nigh.

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He saw the Lily's fragile cup
With dew and sunlight brimming up,
And, as he marked each beauty well,
The petals pure as pearliest shell,
And on the lowly bending stem
The tear-drop sparkling like a gem,
The Prince was glad, and stooping down
Plucked it, and set it in his crown;
And 'mid the jewels glittering there
None shone so royally and rare,
For none was half so pure and fair.
Dear child, 't is our ingratitude,
And faithless fear, and sullen mood,
Darken a world so bright and good!
There 's nothing beautiful and true —
There 's not a rift of heaven's blue,
And not a flower, or dancing leaf,
But shames our selfish-hearted grief.
His hand that feels the sparrow's fall,
And builds the bee his castle-wall,
And spreads the tiniest insect's sail,
And tints the violet's purple veil,
Will never let His children stray
Or wander from His arms away.

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To-day may seem all cold and dim —
Trust the To-morrow unto Him.
'T is slander that we often hear, —
"Hope whispers falsehoods in our ear," —
There 's no such lying voice as Fear.
Hope is a prophet sent from Heaven,
Fear is a false and croaking raven.
The dawn that buds all gray and cold
Will blossom to a sky of gold;
God's love shall like a sunrise stay
To lighten all the future way —
Still brighter to the Perfect Day.

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THE CREATION

A FOUNTAIN rusheth upward from God's throne;
Its streaming stem we name Eternal Power:
Its tossing drops are worlds, that spin and fall,
While on their spheres our little human lives
Like gleams and shadows swiftly glance and go.

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THE FIRST CAUSE

Doubtless the linnet, shut within its cage,
Thinks the fair child that loves it, brings it seed,
And hangs it, chirping to it, in the sun,
Is the preserver of its little world.
Doubtless the child, within her nursery walls,
Thinks her kind father is the father of all
Those happy children, chattering on the lawn—
Keeps yonder town as well as this bright room,
And pours the brook that sparkles past the door.
Doubtless we think the Being who made man,
The visible world, space powdered thick with stars,
The golden fruit whose core is curious life,
Created all things — love, and law, and death;
Fate, the crowned forehead; Will, the sceptred hand.
Perchance — perchance: yet need it be that He
Who planted us is the Head-gardener? What
If beyond Him rose rank on rank, as the bulb
Is higher than the crystals of its food,
And he who sets it, higher than the flower,
And he that owns the garden, more than all?

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The great Cause works through lesser ones; permits
The plant to bear dead buds on dying stems;
The beaver to weave dams that the stream snaps;
The workman to make watches that lose time,
Or organ pipes all jarred and out of tune.
Did not I build a playhouse for my boys,
And made it ill, and that loose plank fell down
And hurt the children? And did not I learn,
After three trials, how to make it well?
Know we the limit of the power He gives
To lesser Wills to will imperfectly?
Is earth that limit? Is the last link man,
Between the finite and the infinite?
When that new star flared out in heaven, and died,
Who knows what Spirit, failing in his plan,
Dashed out his work in wrath, to try anew?
O mother world! we stammer at thy knee
Vainly our childish questions. 'T is enough
For such as we to know, that on His throne,
Nearer than we can think, and farther off
Than any mind can fathom, sits the One,
And sees to it — though pain and evil come,
And all may not be good — that all is well.

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SEMELE

What were the garden-bowers of Thebes to me?
What cared I for their dances and their feasts,
Whose heart awaited an immortal doom?
The Greek youths mocked me, since I shunned in scorn
Them and their praises of my brows and hair.
The light girls pointed after me, who turned
Soul-sick from their unending fooleries.
Apollo's noon-glare wrathfully beat down
Upon the head that would not bend to him—
Him in his fuming anger!—as the highest.
In every lily's cup a venomous thing
Crooked up its hairy limbs; or, if I bent
To pluck a blue-eyed blossom in the grass,
Some squatted horror leered with motionless eyes.
I think the very earth did hate my feet,
And put forth thistles to them, since I loathed
Her bare brown bosom; and the scowling pines
Menaced me with dark arms, and hissed their threats
Behind me, hurrying through their gloom, to watch
(Blurred in unsteady tears till all their beams

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Dazzled, and shrank, and grew) that oval ring
Of shining points that rift the Milky Way,
Revealing, through their gap in the dusted fire,
The hollow awfulness of night beyond.

There came a change: a glory fell to me.
No more 't was Semele, the lonely girl,
But Jupiter's Beloved, Semele.
With human arms the god came clasping me:
New life streamed from his presence; and a voice
That scarce could curb itself to the smooth Greek
Now and anon swept forth in those deep nights,
Thrilling my flesh with awe; mysterious words —
I knew not what; hints of unearthly things
That I had felt on solemn summer noons,
When sleeping earth dreamed music, and the heart
Went crooning a low song it could not learn,
But wandered over it, as one who gropes
For a forgotten chord upon a lyre.

Yea, Jupiter! But why this mortal guise,
Wooing as if he were a milk-faced boy?
Did I lack lovers? Was my beauty dulled,

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The golden hair turned dross, the lithe limbs shrunk,
The deathless longings tamed, that I should seethe
My soul in love like any shepherd girl?
One night he sware to grant whate'er I asked;
And straight I cried, "To know thee as thou art!
To hold thee on my heart as Juno does!
Come in thy thunder — kill me with one fierce
Divine embrace! Thine oath! — Now, Earth, at last!"

The heavens shot one swift sheet of lurid flame:
The world crashed: from a body scathed and torn
The soul leapt through, and found his breast, and died.
"Died?" — So the Theban maidens think, and laugh,
Saying, "She had her wish, that Semele!"
But sitting here upon Olympus' height
I look down, through that oval ring of stars,
And see the far-off Earth, a twinkling speck —
Dust-mote whirled up from the Sun's chariot-wheel —
And pity their small hearts that hold a man
As if he were a god; or know the god —
Or dare to know him — only as a man!
— O human love, art thou forever blind?

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A POET'S APOLOGY

Truth cut on high in tablets of hewn stone,
  Or on great columns gorgeously adorned,
Perchance were left alone,
  Passed by and scorned;
But Truth enchased upon a jewel rare,
A man would keep, and next his bosom wear.

So, many an hour, I sit and carve my gems —
  Ten spoiled, for one in purer beauty set:
Not for kings' diadems —
  Some amulet
That may be worn o'er hearts that toil and plod, —
Though but one pearl that bears the name of God.

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ONE TOUCH OF NATURE

Cruel and wild the battle:
Great horses plunged and reared,
And through dust-cloud and smoke-cloud,
Blood-red with sunset's angry flush,
You heard the gun-shots rattle,
And, 'mid hoof-tramp and rush,
The shrieks of women speared.

For it was Russ and Turcoman,—
No quarter asked or given;
A whirl of frenzied hate and death
Across the desert driven.
Look! the half-naked horde gives way,
Fleeing frantic without breath,
Or hope, or will; and on behind
The troopers storm, in blood-thirst blind,
While, like a dreadful fountain-play,
The swords flash up, and fall, and slay—
Wives, grandsires, baby brows and gray,

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Groan after groan, yell upon yell—
Are men but fiends, and is earth hell?

Nay, for out of the flight and fear
Spurs a Russian cuirassier;
In his arms a child he bears.
Her little foot bleeds; stern she stares
Back at the ruin of her race.
The small hurt creature sheds no tear,
Nor utters cry; but clinging still
To this one arm that does not kill,
She stares back with her baby face.

Apart, fenced round with ruined gear,
The hurrying horseman finds a space,
Where, with face crouched upon her knee,
A woman cowers. You see him stoop
And reach the child down tenderly,
Then dash away to join his troop.

How came one pulse of pity there—
One heart that would not slay, but save—
In all that Christ-forgotten sight?
Was there, far north by Neva's wave,

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Some Russian girl in sleep-robes white,
Making her peaceful evening prayer,
That Heaven's great mercy 'neath its care
Would keep and cover him to-night?

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THE CRICKETS IN THE FIELDS

One, or a thousand voices? — filling noon
With such an undersong and drowsy chant
As sings in ears that waken from a swoon,
And know not yet which world such murmurs haunt:
Single, then double beats, reiterant;
Far off and near; one ceaseless, changeless tune.

If bird or breeze awake the dreamy will,
We lose the song, as it had never been;
Then suddenly we find 't is singing still
And had not ceased. — So, friend of mine, within
My thoughts one underthought, beneath the din
Of life, doth every quiet moment fill.

Thy voice is far, thy face is hid from me,
But day and night are full of dreams of thee.

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HERMIONE

I

THE LOST MAGIC

White in her snowy stone, and cold,
With azure veins and shining arms,
Pygmalion doth his bride behold,
Rapt on her pure and sculptured charms.

Ah! in those half-divine old days
Love still worked miracles for men;
The gods taught lovers wondrous ways
To breathe a soul in marble then.

He gazed, he yearned, he vowed, he wept.
Some secret witchery touched her breast;
And, laughing April tears, she stepped
Down to his arms and lay at rest.

Dear artist of the storied land!
I too have loved a heart of stone.

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What was thy charm of voice or hand,
Thy secret spell, Pygmalion?

II

INFLUENCES

If quiet autumn mornings would not come,
With golden light, and haze, and harvest wain,
And spices of the dead leaves at my feet;
If sunsets would not burn through cloud, and stain
With fading rosy flush the dusky dome;
If the young mother would not croon that sweet
Old sleep-song, like the robin's in the rain;
If the great cloud-ships would not float and drift
Across such blue all the calm afternoon;
If night were not so hushed; or if the moon
Might pause forever by that pearly rift,
Nor fill the garden with its flood again;
If the world were not what it still must be,
Then might I live forgetting love and thee.

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III

THE DEAD LETTER

The letter came at last. I carried it
To the deep woods unopened. All the trees
Were hushed, as if they waited what was writ,
And feared for me. Silent they let me sit
Among them; leaning breathless while I read,
And bending down above me where they stood.
A long way off I heard the delicate tread
Of the light-footed loiterer, the breeze,
Come walking toward me in the leafy wood.
I burned the page that brought me love and woe.
At first it writhed to feel the spires of flame,
Then lay quite still; and o'er each word there came
Its white ghost of the ash, and burning slow
Each said: "You cannot kill the spirit; know
That we shall haunt you, even till heart and brain
Lie as we lie in ashes — all in vain."

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IV

THE SONG IN THE NIGHT

In the deep night a little bird
  Wakens, or dreams he is awake:
Cheerily clear one phrase is heard,
  And you almost feel the morning break.

In the deep dark of loss and wrong,
  One face like a lovely dawn will thrill,
And all night long at my heart a song
  Suddenly stirs and then is still.

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REPROOF IN LOVE

Because we are shut out from light,
Each of the other's look and smile;
Because the arms' and lips' delight
Are past and dead, a weary while;

Because the dawn, that joy has brought,
Brings now but certainty of pain,
Nothing for you and me has bought
The right to live our lives in vain.

Take not away the only lure
That leads me on my lonely way,
To know you noble, sweet, and pure,
Great in least service, day by day.

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TEMPTED

Yes, I know what you say:
  Since it cannot be soul to soul,
Be it flesh to flesh, as it may;
  But is Earth the whole?

Shall a man betray the Past
  For all Earth gives?
"But the Past is dead?" At last,
  It is all that lives.

Which were the nobler goal —
  To snatch at the moment's bliss,
Or to swear I will keep my soul
  Clean for her kiss?

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ALONE

Still earth turns and pulses stir,
And each day hath its deed;
But if I be dead to her,
What is the life I lead?

Cares the cuckoo for the wood,
When the red leaves are down?
Stays the robin near the brood,
When they are fledged and flown?

Yea, we live; the common air
To both its bounty brings.
Mockery! Can the absent share
The half-forgotten things?

Barren comfort fancy doles
To him that truly sees;
Sullen Earth can sever souls
Far as the Pleiades.

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Take thy toys, stepmother Earth,—
  Take force of limb and brain;
All thy gifts are little worth,
  Till her I find again.

Grass may spring and buds may stir,—
  Why should mine eyes take heed?
For if I be dead to her,
  Then am I dead indeed.

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TO A MAID DEMURE

Often when the night is come,
With its quiet group at home,
While they broider, knit, or sew,
Read, or chat in voices low,
Suddenly you lift your eyes
With an earnest look, and wise;
But I cannot read their lore,—
Tell me less, or tell me more.

Like a picture in a book,
Pure and peaceful is your look,
Quietly you walk your ways;
Steadfast duty fills the days.
Neither tears nor fierce delights,
Feverish days nor tossing nights,
Any troublous dreams confess,—
Tell me more, or tell me less.

Swift the weeks are on the wing;
Years are brief, and love a thing

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Blooming, fading, like a flower;
Wake and seize the little hour.
Give me welcome, or farewell;
Quick! I wait! And who can tell
What to-morrow may befall,—
Love me more, or not at all.

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THE COUP DE GRACE

If I were very sure
That all was over betwixt you and me—
That, while this endless absence I endure
With but one mood, one dream, one misery
Of waiting, you were happier to be free,—

Then I might find again
In cloud and stream and all the winds that blow,
Yea, even in the faces of my fellow-men,
The old companionship; and I might know
Once more the pulse of action, ere I go.

But now I cannot rest,
While this one pleading, querulous tone without
Breaks in and mars the music in my breast.
I open the closed door — lo! all about,
What seem your lingering footprints; then I doubt.

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Waken me from this sleep!
Strike fearless, let the naked truth-edge gleam!
For while the beautiful old past I keep,
I am a phantom, and all mortals seem
But phantoms, and my life fades as a dream.

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THE WORLD RUNS ROUND

FOR THE ANNIVERSARY OF THE OVERLAND MAGAZINE, SAN FRANCISCO, 1884

THE world runs round,
And the world runs well;
And at heaven's bound,
Weaving what the hours shall tell
Of the future way,
Sit the great Norns, sisters gray.
Now a thread of doom and hate,
Now a skein of life and love,—
Whether hearing shriek or psalm,
Hearts that curse or pray,
Most composed and very calm
Is their weaving, soon and late.

One man's noisy years go by,
Rich to the crowd's shallow eye,
Full of big and empty sound,
Brandished gesture, voice profound,
Blustering benevolence,

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Thin in deeds and poor in pence.
Ont of it all, so loud and long,
What one thread that 's clean and strong
To weave the coming good,
Can the great Norns find?
But where some poor child stood,
And shrank, and wept its faultiness,
Out of that little life so blind
The great web takes a golden strand
That shall shine and that shall stand
The whole wide world to bless.

One man walks in silk:
Honey and milk
Flow through his days.
Corn loads his wains,
He hath all men's praise,
He sees his heart's desire.
In all his veins
What can the sorrowful Norns
Find of heroic fire?
Another finds his ways
All blocked and barred.
Lonely, he grapples hard,

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Sets teeth and bleeds.
Then the glad Norns
Know he succeeds,
With victory wrought
Greater than he sought.

When will the world believe
Force is for him that is met and fought:
Storm hath no song till the pine resists;
Lightning no flame when it runs as it lists;
So do the wise Norns weave.
The world runs round,
And the world runs well:
It needs no prophet, when evil is found,
Good to foretell.

Many the voices
Ruffling the air:
This one rejoices,
That in despair
Past the sky-bars
Climbs to the stars.

One voice is heard
By the ocean's shore,

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Speaking a word
Quiet and sane,
Amid the human rush and roar
Like a robin's song in the rain.
The red gold of the sun
Seems to stream in power
Already from behind the shower
When that song 's begun.

It doth not insist, or claim;
You may hear, or go:
It clamors not for gain or fame,
Tranquilly and slow
It speaketh unafraid,
Calls the spade, spade,
With the large sense mature
Of him that hath both sat and roved,
And with a solemn undercurrent pure,
As his that now hath lived and loved.
Brightened with glimpse and gleam
Of mother-wit —
There is more salt in it,
More germ and sperm
Of the great things to be,
Than louder notes men speak and sing.

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It is a voice of Spring,
Clear and firm.
Tones prophetic in it flow,
Steady and strong,
Yet soft and low —
An excellent thing in song.
"I can wait," saith merry Spring,
If the rain runneth, and the wind hummeth,
And the mount at morn be hoar with snow,
In the frost the violet dozes,
Wind and rain bear breath of roses,
And the great summer cometh
Wherein all things shall gayly bloom and grow.
Long may the voice be found,
Potent its spell,
While the world runs round,
And the world runs well.

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SUNDAY

Not a dread cavern, hoar with damp and mould,
Where I must creep, and in the dark and cold,
  Offer some awful incense at a shrine
  That hath no more divine
Than that 't is far from life, and stern, and old;

But a bright hilltop in the breezy air,
Full of the morning freshness high and clear,
  Where I may climb and drink the pure, new day,
  And see where winds away
The path that God would send me, shining fair.

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ON SECOND THOUGHT

THE end 's so near,
It is all one
What track I steer,
What work 's begun.
It is all one
If *nothing* 's done,
The end 's so near!

The end 's so near,
It is all one
What track thou steer,
What work 's begun —
Some deed, *some* plan,
As thou 'rt a man!
The end 's so near!

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HIS LOST DAY

Growing old, and looking back
Wistfully along his track,
I have heard him try to tell,
With a smile a little grim,
Why a world he loved so well
Had no larger fruit of him : —

'T was one summer, when the time
Loiterëd like drowsy rhyme,
Sauntering on his idle way
Somehow he had lost a day.
Whether 't was the daisies meek,
Keeping Sabbath all the week,
Birds without one work-day even,
Or the little pagan bees,
Busy all the sunny seven, —
Whether sleep at afternoon,
Or much rising with the moon,
Couching with the morning star,
Or enchantments like to these,
Had confused his calendar, —

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"It is Saturday," men said.
"Nay, 't is Friday," obstinate
Clung the notion in his head.
Had the cloudy sisters three
In their weaving of his fate,
Dozed, and dropped a stitch astray?

"'T was the losing of that day
Cost my fortune," he would say.
On that day I should have writ
Screeds of wisdom and of wit;
Should have sung the missing song,
Wonderful, and sweet, and strong;
Might have solved men's doubt and dream
With some waiting truth supreme.
If another thing there be
That a groping hand may miss
In a twilight world like this,
Those lost hours its grace and glee
Surely would have brought to me."

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FERTILITY

CLEAR water on smooth rock
Could give no foothold for a single flower,
Or slenderest shaft of grain:
The stone must crumble under storm and rain —
The forests crash beneath the whirlwind's power —
And broken boughs from many a tempest-shock,
And fallen leaves of many a wintry hour,
Must mingle in the mould,
Before the harvest whitens on the plain,
Bearing an hundred-fold.
Patience, O weary heart!
Let all thy sparkling hours depart,
And all thy hopes be withered with the frost,
And every effort tempest-tost —
So, when all life's green leaves
Are fallen, and mouldered underneath the sod,
Thou shalt go not too lightly to thy God,
But heavy with full sheaves.

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THE MYSTERY

I NEVER know why 't is I love thee so:
  I do not think 't is that thine eyes for me
  Grow bright as sudden sunshine on the sea;
Nor for thy rose-leaf lips, or breast of snow,
Or voice like quiet waters where they flow.

So why I love thee well I cannot tell:
  Only it is that when thou speak'st to me
  'T is thy voice speaks, and when thy face I see
It is thy face I see; and it befell
Thou wert, and I was, and I love thee well.

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THE LOST BIRD

What cared she for the free hearts? She would com
fort
The prisoned one:
What recked I of the wanton other singers?
She sang for me alone —
Was all my own, my own!

But when they loaded me with heavier fetters,
And chained I lay,
How could she know I longed to reach her window?
Athirst the livelong day,
At eve she fled away.

Still stands her cage wide open at the casement,
In sun and rain,
Though years have gone, and rust has thickly gath-
ered, —
My watching all in vain;
She will not come again.

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Against its wires I strum with idle fingers
From morn to noon;
I swing the door with loitering touch, and listen
To hear that old-time tune,
Sweet as the soul of June.

My bird, my silver voice that cheered my prison,
Hushed, lost to me:
And still I wait for death, in chains, forsaken,
(Soon may the summons be!)
But she is free.
— "Is free?"

Nay, in the palace porches caught and hanging,
Who says 't is gay —
The song the false prince hears? who says her singing,
From day to summer day,
Grieves not her heart away?

But when my dream comes true in that last sleeping,
And death makes free,
Against the blue shall snowy wings come sweeping,
My bird flown back to me,
Mine for eternity!

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WARNING

Be true to me! For there will dawn a day
When thou wilt find the faith that now I see,
Bow at the shrines where I must bend the knee,
Knowing the great from small. Then lest thou say,
"Ah me, that I had never flung away
His love who would have stood so close to me
Where now I walk alone" — lest there should be
Such vain regret, Love, oh be true! But nay,
Not true to me: true to thine own high quest
Of truth; the aspiration in thy breast,
Noble and blind, that pushes by my hand,
And will not lean, yet cannot surely stand;
True to thine own pure heart, as mine to thee
Beats true. So shalt thou best be true to me.

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SUMMER AFTERNOON

Far in hollow mountain cañons
Brood with purple-folded pinions,
Flocks of drowsy distance-colors on their nests;
And the bare round slopes for forests
Have cloud-shadows, floating forests,
On their breasts.

Winds are wakening and dying,
Questions low with low replying,
Through the oak a hushed and trembling whisper goes:
Faint and rich the air with odors,
Hyacinth and spicy odors
Of the rose.

Even the flowerless acacia
Is one flower — such slender stature,
With its latticed leaves a-tremble in the sun:
They have shower-drops for blossoms,
Quivering globes of diamond blossoms,
Every one.

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In the blue of heaven holy
Clouds go floating, floating slowly,
Pure in snowy robe and sunny silver crown;
And they seem like gentle angels —
Leisure-full and loitering angels,
Looking down.

Half the birds are wild with singing,
And the rest with rhythmic winging
Sing in melody of motion to the sight;
Every little sparrow twitters,
Cheerily chirps, and cheeps, and twitters
His delight.

Sad at heart amid the splendor,
Dull to all the radiance tender,
What can I for such a world give back again?
Could I only hint the beauty —
Some least shadow of the beauty,
Unto men!

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SUMMER NIGHT

From the warm garden in the summer night
All faintest odors came: the tuberose white
Glimmered in its dark bed, and many a bloom
Invisibly breathed spices on the gloom.
It stirred a trouble in the man's dull heart,
A vexing, mute unrest: "Now what thou art,
Tell me!" he said in anger. Something sighed,
"I am the poor ghost of a ghost that died
In years gone by." And he recalled of old
A passion dead — long dead, even then — that came
And haunted many a night like this, the same
In their dim hush above the fragrant mould
And glimmering flowers, and troubled all his breast.
"Rest!" then he cried; "perturbëd spirit, rest!"

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A CALIFORNIAN'S DREAMS

A THUNDER-STORM of the olden days!
The red sun sinks in a sleepy haze;
The sultry twilight, close and still,
Muffles the cricket's drowsy trill.
Then a round-topped cloud rolls up the west,
Black to its smouldering, ashy crest,
And the chariot of the storm you hear,
With its jarring axle rumbling near;
Till the blue is hid, and here and there
The sudden, blinding lightnings glare.
Scattering now the big drops fall,
Till the rushing rain in a silver wall
Blurs the line of the bending elms,
Then blots them out and the landscape whelms.
A flash — a clap, and a rumbling peal:
The broken clouds the blue reveal;
The last bright drops fall far away,
And the wind, that had slept for heat all day,
With a long-drawn sigh awakes again
And drinks the cool of the blessed rain.

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November! night, and a sleety storm:
Close are the ruddy curtains, warm
And rich in the glow of the roaring grate.
It may howl outside like a baffled fate,
And rage on the roof, and lash the pane
With its fierce and impotent wrath in vain.
Sitting within at our royal ease
We sing to the chime of the ivory keys,
And feast our hearts from script and score
With the wealth of the mellow hearts of yore.

A winter's night on a world of snow!
Not a sound above, not a stir below:
The moon hangs white in the icy air,
And the shadows are motionless everywhere.
Is this the planet that we know —
This silent floor of the ghostly snow?
Or is this the moon, so still and dead,
And yonder orb far overhead,
With its silver map of plain and sea,
Is that the earth where we used to be?
Shall we float away in the frosty blue
To that living, summer world we knew,
With its full, hot heart-beats as of old,
Or be frozen phantoms of the cold?

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A river of ice, all blue and glare,
Under a star-shine dim and rare.
The sheeny sheet in the sparkling light
Is ribbed with slender wisps of white —
Crinkles of snow, that the flying steel
Lightly crunches with ringing heel.
Swinging swift as the swallows skim,
You round the shadowy river's rim:
Falling somewhere out of the sky
Hollow and weird is the owlet's cry;
The gloaming woods seem phantom hosts,
And the bushes cower in the snow like ghosts.
Till the tinkling feet that with you glide
Skate closer and closer to your side,
And something steals from a furry muff,
And you clasp it and cannot wonder enough
That a little palm so soft and fair
Could keep so warm in the frosty air.

'T is thus we dream in our tranquil clime,
Rooted still in the olden time;
Longing for all those glooms and gleams
Of passionate Nature's mad extremes.
Or was it only our hearts, that swelled
With the youth and life and love they held?

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FULFILLMENT

All the skies had gloomed in gray,
Many a week, day after day.
Nothing came the blank to fill,
Nothing stirred the stagnant will.
Winds were raw; buds would not swell:
Some malign and sullen spell
Soured the currents of the year,
And filled the heart with lurking fear.

In his room he moped and glowered,
Where the leaden daylight lowered;
Drummed the casement, turned his book,
Hating nature's hostile look.

Suddenly there came a day
When he flung his gloom away.
Something hinted help was near:
Winds were fresh and sky was clear;
Light he stepped, and firmly planned, —
Some good news was close at hand

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Truly: for when day was done,
He was lying all alone,
Fretted pulse had ceased to beat,
Very still were hands and feet,
And the robins through the long
Twilight sang his slumber song.

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THE SINGER

Silly bird!
When his mate is near,
Not a note of singing shall you hear.
Take his little love away,
Half the livelong day
Will his tune be heard —
Silly bird!

Sunny days
Silent basks he in the light,
Little sybarite!
But when all the room
Darkens in the gloom,
And the rain
Pours and pours along the pane,
He is bent
(Ah, the small inconsequent!)
On defying all the weather;
Rain and cloud and storm together
Naught to him,
Singing like the seraphim.

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So we know a poet's ways:
Sunny days,
Silent he
In his fine serenity;
But if winds are loud,
He will pipe beneath the cloud;
And if one is far away,
Sings his heart out, as to say, —
"It may be
She will hear and come to me."

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THE THINGS THAT WILL NOT DIE

WHAT am I glad will stay when I have passed
From this dear valley of the world, and stand
On yon snow-glimmering peaks, and lingering cast
From that dim land
A backward look, and haply stretch my hand,
Regretful, now the wish comes true at last?

Sweet strains of music I am glad will be
Still wandering down the wind, for men will hear
And think themselves from all their care set free,
And heaven near
When summer stars burn very still and clear,
And waves of sound are swelling like the sea.

And it is good to know that overhead
Blue skies will brighten, and the sun will shine,
And flowers be sweet in many a garden bed,
And all divine,
(For are they not, O Father, thoughts of thine?)
Earth's warmth and fragrance shall on men be shed.

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And I am glad that Night will always come,
  Hushing all sounds, even the soft-voiced birds,
Putting away all light from her deep dome,
    Until are heard
  In the wide starlight's stillness, unknown words,
That make the heart ache till it find its home.

And I am glad that neither golden sky,
  Nor violet lights that linger on the hill,
Nor ocean's wistful blue shall satisfy,
    But they shall fill
  With wild unrest and endless longing still
The soul whose hope beyond them all must lie.

And I rejoice that love shall never seem
  So perfect as it ever was to be,
But endlessly that inner haunting dream
    Each heart shall see
  Hinted in every dawn's fresh purity,
Hopelessly shadowed in each sunset's gleam.

And though warm mouths will kiss and hands will
    cling,
  And thought by silent thought be understood,

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I do rejoice that the next hour will bring
That far-off mood,
That drives one like a lonely child to God,
Who only sees and measures everything.

And it is well that when these feet have pressed
The outward path from earth, 't will not seem sad
To them that stay; but they who love me best
Will be most glad
That such a long unquiet now has had,
At last, a gift of perfect peace and rest.

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THE SECRET

A TIDE of sun and song in beauty broke
Against a bitter heart, where no voice woke
Till thus it spoke: —

What was it, in the old time that I know,
That made the world with inner beauty glow,
Now a vain show?

Still dance the shadows on the grass at play,
Still move the clouds like great, calm thoughts away,
Nor haste, nor stay.

But I have lost that breath within the gale,
That light to which the daylight was a veil,
The star-shine pale.

Still all the summer with its songs is filled,
But that delicious undertone they held —
Why is it stilled?

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Then I took heart that I would find again
The voices that had long in silence lain,
Nor live in vain.

I stood at noonday in the hollow wind,
Listened at midnight, straining heart and mind
If I might find!

But all in vain I sought, at eve and morn,
On sunny seas, in dripping woods forlorn,
Till tired and worn,

One day I left my solitary tent
And down into the world's bright garden went,
On labor bent.

The dew stars and the buds about my feet
Began their old bright message to repeat,
In odors sweet;

And as I worked at weed and root in glee,
Now humming and now whistling cheerily,
It came to me, —

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The secret of the glory that was fled
Shone like a sweep of sun all overhead,
And something said, —

"The blessing came because it was not sought;
There was no care if thou wert blest or not:
The beauty and the wonder all thy thought, —
Thyself forgot."

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LOST LOVE

Bury it, and sift
  Dust upon its light, —
Death must not be left,
  To offend the sight.

Cover the old love —
  Weep not on the mound —
Grass shall grow above,
  Lilies spring around.

Can we fight the law,
  Can our natures change —
Half-way through withdraw —
  Other lives exchange?

You and I must do
  As the world has done,
There is nothing new
  Underneath the sun.

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Fill the grave up full —
  Put the dead love by —
Not that men are dull,
  Not that women lie, —

But 't is well and right —
  Safest, you will find —
That the Out of Sight
  Should be Out of Mind.

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APPRECIATED

Ah, could I but be understood!"
(I prayed the powers above,)
"Could but some spirit, bright and good,
Know me, and, knowing, love!"

One summer's day there came to pass—
A maid; and it befell
She spied and knew me: yea, alas!
She knew me all too well.

Gray were the eyes of Rosamund,
And I could see them see
Through and through me, and beyond,
And care no more for me.

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MOODS

Dawn has blossomed: the sun is nigh:
Pearl and rose in the wimpled sky,
Rose and pearl on a brightening blue:
(She is true, and she is true!)

The noonday lies all warm and still
And calm, and over sleeping hill
And wheatfields falls a dreamy hue:
(If she be true — if she be true!)

The patient evening comes, most sad and fair:
Veiled are the stars: the dim and quiet air
Breathes bitter scents of hidden myrrh and rue:
(If she were true — if she were only true!)

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SPACE

Black, frost-cold distance, sparsely honeycombed
With hollow shells of glimmering golden light;
Mere amber bubbles floating through the night,
Lit by one centred sparkle, azure-domed,
With circling motes where life hath lodged and roamed.

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UNTIMELY THOUGHT

I LOOKED across the lawn one summer's day,
Deep shadowed, dreaming in the drowsy light,
And thought, what if this afternoon, so bright
And still, should end it? — as it may.

Blue dome, and flocks of fleece that slowly pass
Before the pale old moon, the while she keeps
Her sleepy watch, and ancient pear that sweeps
Its low, fruit-laden skirts along the grass.

What if I had to say to all of these,
"So this is the last time" — suddenly there
My love came loitering under the great trees;

And now the thought I could no longer bear:
Startled I flung it from me, as one flings
All sharply from the hand a bee that stings.

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THE LIFE NATURAL

Overhead the leaf-song, on the upland slope;
Over that the azure, clean from base to cope;
Belle the mare beside me, drowsy from her lope.

Goldy-green the wheat-field, like a fluted wall
In the pleasant wind, with waves that rise and fall,
"Moving all together," if it "move at all."

Shakespeare in my pocket, lest I feel alone,
Lest the brooding landscape take a sombre tone;
Good to have a poet to fall back upon!

But the vivid beauty makes the book absurd:
What beside the real world is the written word?
Keep the page till winter, when no thrush is heard!

Why read Hamlet here? — what 's Hecuba to me?
Let me read the grain-field; let me read the tree;
Let me read mine own heart, deep as I can see.

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THE ORACLE

Down in its crystal hollow
  Gleams the ebon well of ink:
In the deepest drop lies lurking
  The thought all men shall think.

Fair on the waiting tablet
  Lies the empty paper's space:
Out of its snow shall flush a word
  Like an angel's earnest face.

Who in those depths shall cast his line
  For the gnome that hugs that thought?
Who from the snowy field shall charm
  That flower of truth untaught?

Not in the lore of the ancients,
  Not in the yesterday:
On the lips of the living moments
  The gods their message lay.

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Somewhere near it is waiting,
  Like a night-wind wandering free,
Seeking a mouth to speak through, —
  Whose shall the message be?

It may steal forth like a flute note,
  It may be suddenly hurled
In blare upon blare of a trumpet blast,
  To startle and stir the world.

Hark! but just on the other side
  Some thinnest wall of dreams,
Murmurs a whispered music,
  And softest rose-light gleams.

Listen, and watch, and tell the world
  What it almost dies to know:
Or wait — and the wise old world will say,
  "I knew it long ago."

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FORCE

The stars know a secret
They do not tell;
And morn brings a message
Hidden well.

There 's a blush on the apple,
A tint on the wing,
And the bright wind whistles,
And the pulses sting.

Perish dark memories!
There 's light ahead;
This world 's for the living;
Not for the dead.

In the shining city,
On the loud pave,
The life-tide is running
Like a leaping wave.

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How the stream quickens,
As noon draws near,
No room for loiterers,
No time for fear.

Out on the farm lands
Earth smiles as well;
Gold-crusted grain-fields,
With sweet, warm smell;

Whir of the reaper,
Like a giant bee;
Like a Titan cricket,
Thrilling with glee.

On mart and meadow,
Pavement or plain;
On azure mountain,
Or azure main —

Heaven bends in blessing;
Lost is but won;
Goes the good rain-cloud,
Comes the good sun!

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Only babes whimper,
  And sick men wail,
And faint hearts and feeble hearts
  And weaklings fail.

Down the great currents
  Let the boat swing;
There was never winter
  But brought the spring.

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NIGHT AND PEACE

Night in the woods, — night:
  Peace, peace on the plain.
The last red sunset beam
  Belts the tall beech with gold;
  The quiet kine are in the fold,
And stilly flows the stream.
  Soon shall we see the stars again,
  For one more day down to its rest has lain,
And all its cares have taken flight,
  And all its doubt and pain.
Night in the woods, — night:
  Peace, peace on the plain.

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THE SINGER'S CONFESSION

Once he cried to all the hills and waters
And the tossing grain and tufted grasses:
"Take my message — tell it to my brothers!
Stricken mute I cannot speak my message.
When the evening wind comes back from ocean,
Singing surf-songs, to Earth's fragrant bosom,
And the beautiful young human creatures
Gather at the mother feet of Nature,
Gazing with their pure and wistful faces,
Tell the old heroic human story.
When they weary of the wheels of science,
Grinding, jangling their harsh dissonances, —
Stones and bones and alkalis and atoms, —
Sing to them of human hope and passion;
And the soul divine, whose incarnation,
Born of love — alas! my message stumbles,
Faints on faltering lips: Oh, speak it for me!"

Then a hush fell; and around about him
Suddenly he felt the mighty shadow

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Of the hills, like grave and silent pity;
And, as one who sees without regarding,
The wide wind went over him and left him,
And the brook, repeating low, "His message!"
Babbled, as it fled, a quiet laughter.

What was he, that he had touched their message —
Theirs, who had been chanting it forever:
With whose organ-tones the human spirit
Had eternally been overflowing!
Then, with shame that stung in cheek and forehead,
Slow he crept away.
And now he listens,
Mute and still, to hear them tell their message —
All the holy hills and sacred waters;
When the sea-wind swings its evening censer,
Till the misty incense hides the altar
And the long-robed shadows, lowly kneeling.

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LIVING

"To-day," I thought, "I will not plan nor strive;
Idle as yon blue sky, or clouds that go
Like loitering ships, with sails as white as snow,
I simply will be glad to be alive."

For, year by year, in steady summer glow
The flowers had bloomed, and life had stored its hive,
But tasted not the honey. Quite to thrive,
The flavor of my thrift I now would know.

But the good breeze blew in a friend — a boon
At any hour. There was a book to show,
A gift to take, a slender one to give.
The morning passed to mellow afternoon,
And that to twilight; it was sleep-time soon, —
And lo! again I had forgot to live.

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EVEN THERE

A TROOP of babes in Summer Land,
At heaven's gate — the children's gate:
One lifts the latch with rosy hand,
Then turns and, dimpling, asks her mate, —

"What was the last thing that you saw?"
"I lay and watched the dawn begin,
And suddenly, through the thatch of straw,
A great, clear morning star laughed in."

"And you?" "A floating thistle-down,
Against June sky and cloud-wings white."
"And you?" "A falling blow, a frown —
It frights me yet; oh, clasp me tight!"

"And you?" "A face through tears that smiled" —
The trembling lips could speak no more;
The blue eyes swam; the lonely child
Was homesick even at heaven's door.

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SUMMER RAIN

I SAID: "Blue heaven," (Oh, it was beautiful!)
"Send me a tent to shut me to myself:
I am all lonely for my soul, that wanders
Weary, bewildered, beckoned by thy depths;
Thy white, round clouds, great bubbles of creamy
snow;
Thy luscious sunshine, like some ripe, gold fruit;
Thy songs of birds, and wind warm with the flowers."

And there swept down (Oh, it was beautiful!)
A tent of silver rain, that fell like a veil
Shutting me in to think all quiet thoughts,
And feel the vibrant thrill of shadowy wings
That fluttered, checking their swift flight, and hear,
Though with no syllable of earthly music,
A voice of melody unutterable.

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A RESTING-PLACE

A SEA of shade; with hollow heights above,
  Where floats the redwood's airy roof away,
Whose feathery lace the drowsy breezes move,
  And softly through the azure windows play:
  No nearer stir than yon white cloud astray,
No closer sound than sob of distant dove.

I only live as the deep forest's swoon
  Dreams me amid its dream; for all things fade,
Nor pulse of mine disturbs the unconscious noon.
  Even love and hope are still — albeit they made
  My heart beat yesterday — in slumber laid,
Like yon dim ghost that last night was the moon.

Only the bending grass, grown gray and sear,
  Nods now and then, where at my feet it swings,
Pleased that another like itself is here,
  Unseen among the mighty forest things —
  Another fruitless life, that fading clings
To earth and autumn days in doubt and fear.

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Dream on, O wood! O wind, stay in thy west,
Nor wake the shadowy spirit of the fern,
Asleep along the fallen pine-tree's breast!
That, till the sun go down, and night-stars burn,
And the chill dawn-breath from the sea return,
Tired earth may taste heaven's honey-dew of rest.

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A MEMORY

Upon the barren, lonely hill
We sat to watch the sinking sun;
Below, the land grew dim and still,
Whose evening shadow had begun.
Her finger parted the shut book, —
At Aylmer's Field the leaf was turned, —
Round her meek head and sainted look
The sunset like a halo burned.
She knew not that I watched her face —
Her spirit through her eyes was gone
To some far-off and Sabbath place,
And left me gazing there alone.
Could she have known, that quiet hour,
What ghosts her presence raised in me,
What graves were opened by the power
Of that unconscious witchery,
She would not thus have sat and seen
The bird that balanced far below
On the blue air, and watched the sheen
Along his broad wings come and go.

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For was she not another's bride?
And I — what right had I to feast
Upon those eyes in revery wide,
With hungering gaze like famished beast?
Was it before my fate I knelt —
The human fate, the mighty law —
To hunger for the heart I felt,
And love the lovely face I saw?
Or was it only that the brow,
Or some sweet trick of hand or tone,
Brought from the Past to haunt me now
Her ghost whose love was mine alone?
I know not; but we went to rest
That eve, from songs that haunt me still,
And all night long, in visions blest,
I walked with angels on the hill.

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THE OPEN WINDOW

My tower was grimly builded,
With many a bolt and bar,
"And here," I thought, "I will keep my life
From the bitter world afar."

Dark and chill was the stony floor,
Where never a sunbeam lay,
And the mould crept up on the dreary wall,
With its ghost touch, day by day.

One morn, in my sullen musings,
A flutter and cry I heard;
And close at the rusty casement
There clung a frightened bird.

Then back I flung the shutter
That was never before undone,
And I kept till its wings were rested
The little weary one.

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But in through the open window,
  Which I had forgot to close,
There had burst a gush of sunshine
  And a summer scent of rose.

For all the while I had burrowed
  There in my dingy tower,
Lo! the birds had sung and the leaves had danced
  From hour to sunny hour.

And such balm and warmth and beauty
  Came drifting in since then,
That window still stands open
  And shall never be shut again.

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ON A PICTURE OF MT. SHASTA BY KEITH

Two craggy slopes, sheer down on either hand,
Fall to a cleft, dark and confused with pines.
Out of their sombre shade — one gleam of light —
Escaping toward us like a hurrying child,
Half laughing, half afraid, a white brook runs.
The fancy tracks it back through the thick gloom
Of crowded trees, immense, mysterious
As monoliths of some colossal temple,
Dusky with incense, chill with endless time:
Through their dim arches chants the distant wind,
Hollow and vast, and ancient oracles
Whisper, and wait to be interpreted.
Far up the gorge denser and darker grows
The forest; columns lie with writhen roots in air,
And across open glades the sunbeams slant
To touch the vanishing wing-tips of shy birds;
Till from a mist-rolled valley soar the slopes,
Blue-hazy, dense with pines to the verge of snow,
Up into cloud. Suddenly parts the cloud,

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And lo! in heaven — as pure as very snow,
Uplifted like a solitary world —
A star, grown all at once distinct and clear —
The white earth-spirit, Shasta! Calm, alone,
Silent it stands, cold in the crystal air,
White-bosomed sister of the stainless dawn,
With whom the cloud holds converse, and the storm
Rests there, and stills its tempest into snow.

Once — you remember? — we beheld that vision,
But busy days recalled us, and the whole
Fades now among my memories like a dream.
The distant thing is all incredible,
And the dim past as if it had not been.
Our world flees from us; only the one point,
The unsubstantial moment, is our own.
We are but as the dead, save that swift mote
Of conscious life. Then the great artist comes,
Commands the chariot wheels of Time to stay,
Summons the distant, as by some austere
Grand gesture of a mighty sorcerer's wand,
And our whole world again becomes our own.
So we escape the petty tyranny
Of the incessant hour; pure thought evades

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Its customary bondage, and the mind
Is lifted up, watching the moon-like globe.

How should a man be eager or perturbed
Within this calm? How should he greatly care
For reparation, or redress of wrong, —
To scotch the liar, or spurn the fawning knave,
Or heed the babble of the ignoble crew?
Seest thou yon blur far up the icy slope,
Like a man's footprint? Half thy little town
Might hide there, or be buried in what seems
From yonder cliff a curl of feathery snow.
Still the far peak would keep its frozen calm,
Still at the evening on its pinnacle
Would the one tender touch of sunset dwell,
And o'er it nightlong wheel the silent stars.
So the great globe rounds on, — mountains, and vales,
Forests, waste stretches of gaunt rock and sand,
Shore, and the swaying ocean, — league on league;
And blossoms open, and are sealed in frost;
And babes are born, and men are laid to rest.
What is this breathing atom, that his brain
Should build or purpose aught or aught desire,
But stand a moment in amaze and awe,
Rapt on the wonderfulness of the world?

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THE TREE OF MY LIFE

When I was yet but a child, the gardener gave me a tree,
A little slim elm, to be set wherever seemed good to me.
What a wonderful thing it seemed! with its lace-edge leaves uncurled,
And its span-long stem, that should grow to the grandest tree in the world.
So I searched all the garden round, and out over field and hill,
But not a spot could I find that suited my wayward will.
I would have it bowered in the grove, in a close and quiet vale;
I would rear it aloft on the height, to wrestle with the gale.

Then I said, "I will cover its roots with a little earth by the door,
And there it shall live and wait, while I search for a place once more.

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But still I could never find it, the place for my wondrous tree,
And it waited and grew by the door, while years passed over me.
Till suddenly, one fine day, I saw it was grown too tall,
And its roots gone down too deep, to be ever moved at all.

So here it is growing still, by the lowly cottage door;
Never so grand and tall as I dreamed it would be of yore,
But it shelters a tired old man in its sunshine-dappled shade,
The children's pattering feet round its knotty knees have played,
Dear singing birds in a storm sometimes take refuge there,
And the stars through its silent boughs shine gloriously fair.

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A CHILD AND A STAR

The star, so pure in saintly white,
Deep in the solemn soul of night,
With dreams of deathless beauty wed,
And golden ways that seraphs tread:
The child — so mere a thing of earth,
So meek a flower of mortal birth:
A far-off lucent world, so bright,
Stooping to touch with tender light
That little gown at evening prayer:
It seems a condescension rare, —
Heaven round a common child to glow!
Ah! wiser eyes of angels know
The star, a toy but roughly wrought;
The child, God's own most loving thought.
Yon evening planet, wan with moons,
Colossal, 'mid its dim, swift noons, —
What is it but a bulk of stone,
Like this gray globe we dwell upon?
Down hollow spaces, sightless, chill,
Its vibrant beams in darkness thrill,

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Till through some window drift the rays
Where a pure heart looks up and prays;
And in that silent worshiper,
The waves of feeling stir and stir,
And spread in wider rings above,
To tremble at God's heart of love.
Though it be kingliest one of all
His worlds, 't is but a stony ball:
What are they all, from sun to sun,
But dust and stubble, when all 's done?
Some heavenly grace it only caught,
When, like a hint from home, it brought
To a child's heart one tender thought:
Itself in that great mystery lost,
As some bright pebble, idly tost
Into the darkling sea at night,
Whose widening ripples, running light,
Go out into the infinite.

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AT DAWN

I LAY awake and listened, ere the light
Began to whiten at the window pane.
The world was all asleep: earth was a fane
Emptied of worshipers; its dome of night,
Its silent aisles, were awful in their gloom.
Suddenly from the tower the bell struck four,
Solemn and slow, how slow and solemn! o'er
Those death-like slumberers, each within his room.
The last reverberation pulsed so long
It seemed no tone of earthly mould at all.
But the bell woke a thrush; and with a call
He roused his mate, then poured a tide of song:
"Morning is coming, fresh, and clear, and blue,"
Said that bright song; and then I thought of you.

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AN ADAGE FROM THE ORIENT

At the punch-bowl's brink,
Let the thirsty think
What they say in Japan:

"First the man takes a drink,
Then the drink takes a drink,
Then the drink takes the man!"

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A PARADOX

Haste, haste, O laggard! — leave thy drowsy
dreams;
Cram all thy brain with knowledge — clutch and
cram!
The earth is wide, the universe is vast:
Thou hast infinity to learn. Oh, haste!

Haste not, haste not, my soul! "Infinity!"
Thou hast eternity to learn it in.
Thy boundless lesson through the endless years
Hath boundless leisure. Run not like a slave —
Sit like a king, and see the ranks of worlds
Wheel in their cycles onward to thy feet.

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THE PHILOSOPHER

His wheel of logic whirled and spun all day;
All day he held his system, grinding it
Finer and finer, till 't was fined away.

But the chance sparks of sense and mother-wit,
Flung out as that wheel-logic spun and whirled,
Kindled the nations, and lit up the world.

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A BIRD'S SONG

THE shadow of a bird
On the shadow of a bough;
Sweet and clear his song is heard,
"Seek me now — I seek thee now."
The bird swings out of reach in the swaying tree,
But his shadow on the garden walk below belongs to me.

The phantom of my Love
False dreams with hope doth fill,
Softly singing far above,
"Love me still — I love thee still!"
The cruel vision hovers at my sad heart's door,
But the soul love is soaring out of reach for evermore.

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THE DEAD PRESIDENT

Were there no crowns on earth,
No evergreen to weave a hero's wreath,
That he must pass beyond the gates of death,
Our hero, our slain hero, to be crowned?
Could there on our unworthy earth be found
Naught to befit his worth?

The noblest soul of all!
When was there ever, since our Washington,
A man so pure, so wise, so patient — one
Who walked with this high goal alone in sight,
To speak, to do, to sanction only Right,
Though very heaven should fall!

Ah, not for him we weep;
What honor more could be in store for him?
Who would have had him linger in our dim
And troublesome world, when his great work was done —
Who would not leave that worn and weary one
Gladly to go to sleep?

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For us the stroke was just;
We were not worthy of that patient heart;
We might have helped him more, not stood apart,
And coldly criticised his works and ways —
Too late now, all too late — our little praise
Sounds hollow o'er his dust.

Be merciful, O our God!
Forgive the meanness of our human hearts,
That never, till a noble soul departs,
See half the worth, or hear the angel's wings
Till they go rustling heavenward as he springs
Up from the mounded sod.

Yet what a deathless crown
Of Northern pine and Southern orange-flower,
For victory, and the land's new bridal hour,
Would we have wreathed for that beloved brow!
Sadly upon his sleeping forehead now
We lay our cypress down.

O martyred one, farewell!
Thou hast not left thy people quite alone,

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Out of thy beautiful life there comes a tone
Of power, of love, of trust, a prophecy,
Whose fair fulfillment all the earth shall be,
And all the Future tell.

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ROLAND

A FOOLISH creature full of fears,
  He trembled for his fate,
And stood aghast to feel the earth
  Swing round her dizzy freight.

With timid foot he touched each plan,
  Sure that each plan would fail;
Behemoth's tread was his, it seemed,
  And every bridge too frail.

No glory of the night or day
  Lit any crown for him,
The tranquil past but breathed a mist
  To make the future dim.

The world, his birthright, seemed a cell,
  An iron heritage;
Man, a trapped creature, left to die
  Forgotten in his cage.

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In every dark he held his breath,
And warded off a blow;
While at his shoulder still he sought
Some tagging ghost of woe.

Spying the thorns but not the flowers,
Through all the blossoming land
He hugged his careful heart and shunned
The path on either hand.

The buds that broke their hearts to give
New odors to the air
He saw not; but he caught the scent
Of dead leaves everywhere.

Till on a day he came to know
He had not made the world;
That if he slept, as when he ran,
Each onward planet whirled.

He knew not where the vision fell,
Only all things grew plain —
As if some thatch broke through and let
A sunbeam cross his brain.

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In beauty flushed the morning light,
With blessing dropped the rain,
All creatures were to him most fair,
Nor anything in vain.

He breathed the space that links the stars,
He rested on God's arm —
A man unmoved by accident,
Untouched by any harm.

The weary doubt if all is good,
The doubt if all is ill,
He left to Him who leaves to us
To know that all is well.

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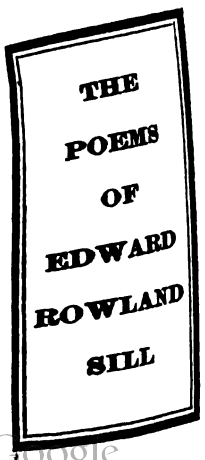

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